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BROTHERS
AND
SISTERS

BY
MARIANNE FARNINGHAM

1489. f. 1610.

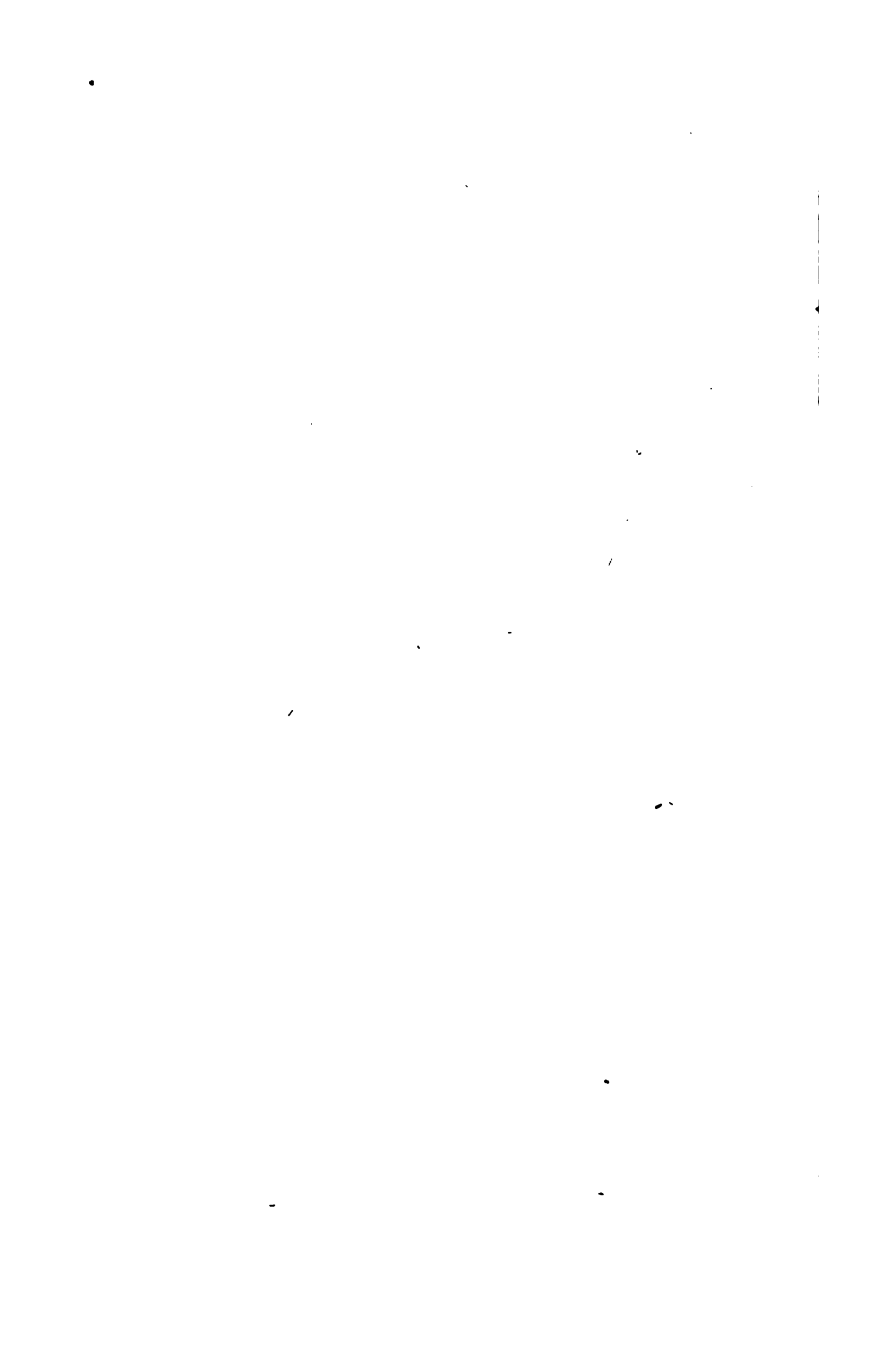




1489. f. 1610.







Brothers and Sisters.

BY

MARIANNE FARNINGHAM,

Author of

"The Cathedral's Shadow,"

"Lays and Lyrics of the Blessed Life,"

"Life Sketches," "Leaves from Elim,"

&c., &c., &c.

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.	
SNAPDRAGON	1
CHAPTER II.	
NEW YEAR'S EVE	7
CHAPTER III.	
LETTICE	15
CHAPTER IV.	
AT SCHOOL	22
CHAPTER V.	
EDWARD	29
CHAPTER VI.	
"HOW IS LETTICE?"	36
CHAPTER VII.	
A SURPRISE FOR HUGH	45
CHAPTER VIII.	
MONEY-BOXES	52
CHAPTER IX.	
FRANK	58
CHAPTER X.	
DID HE DO IT?	66
CHAPTER XI.	
GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY	73

CHAPTER XII.	
"IT IS ALL OVER"	81
CHAPTER XIII.	
AN UNPOPULAR BOY	88
CHAPTER XIV.	
A PARTY	96
CHAPTER XV.	
CLARENCE BROTHERS	103
CHAPTER XVI.	
SAVED—FOR WHAT?	112
CHAPTER XVII.	
AN OFFER FOR HUGH	122
CHAPTER XVIII.	
HOPE FOR LETTICE	130
CHAPTER XIX.	
LETTICE LEFT BEHIND	138
CHAPTER XX.	
A TRIAL FOR EDWARD	146
CHAPTER XXI.	
ALFRED AND DAISY	156
CHAPTER XXII.	
EDWARD TRIES AGAIN	168
CHAPTER XXIII.	
THE FIRST WEDDING	173
CHAPTER XXIV.	
A MERRY CHRISTMAS	179

BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

CHAPTER I.

SNAPDRAGON.

IT was a beautiful morning. No one need have wished for a better, even at Christmas time. The ponds were frozen over, and the ice upon them was firm and strong. The trees looked almost as pretty as when they were covered with spring blossoms, for the snow had sprinkled them on the evening before, and now the sun, shining upon them, made the snow-crystals and icicles like diamonds. For, although it was December, the skies were blue, and the sun shone most pleasantly.

And Christmas-day had really come!

Hugh Clarence could scarcely believe it. He had been looking forward to it, and counting the days that lay between, so long, that now it seemed as if it could not be true.

But, as he lay in his warm, comfortable bed, watching the light that grew brighter every minute, he was soon convinced that this really was the important day.

"I am at home from school," he thought to himself, "and two days ago I helped cook stir the puddings, and chop the mincemeat, and last

night I half awoke to hear music and singing, and of course that meant waits and carols, so Christmas has come certainly ; and I wish everybody a merry Christmas and a happy New Year."

No one could thank Hugh for his wish, although he uttered it aloud, for he was lying alone in his own little room. He lay half an hour longer, thinking. Hugh did most of his thinking at that time in the morning. He was twelve years old, and a very active boy, not much given to reflection at other times. But in the quiet of the morning he thought of his own conduct on the day before, thought of his studies, and successes or failures in them, thought of his parents and brothers and sisters ; but most of all he thought of the future, and what grand things he would do in it.

But this morning one thought kept coming most curiously across all the others, and it was this : "I wonder if anything is the matter with Lettice."

Hugh Clarence was the oldest son in the family, but his sister Lettice was five years older than he. There were, besides these two, three other boys and two girls, Grace, next in age to Hugh, then Frank, Edward, Alfred, and Daisy.

When Hugh had lain awake some time, he heard a very gentle tapping at his door. "Who is there ?" he inquired, promptly.

"It is I, Grace. Are not you ready to get up, Hugh ? It is Christmas-day !"

"I know it is. Yes, I will get up directly."

In a very few minutes he was in the passage, where Grace was awaiting him.

"Let us go downstairs and see what we can find, Hugh."

They went together, and what they saw delighted them very greatly. The house seemed full of preparations for Christmas. The walls were decorated with holly, ivy, and mistletoe, and in one room there was a splendid Christmas-tree ready to be lighted in the evening. You see the Clarence children had much to make them happy.

Before long the household had been aroused by the bells, and all gathered in the breakfast-room, wishing each other a merry Christmas.

"Grace," whispered Hugh, as he took his seat beside his sister, "is anything the matter with Lettice?"

"No, I think not," said Grace. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I am afraid there is. She does not look quite like herself."

"Nonsense."

And, indeed, Hugh began to think it was a foolish idea which had entered his head, for in a very few minutes Lettice had taken her seat, and was the merriest of the group, with the colour flushing her face, as it always did when she was excited, and her eyes as bright as ever.

"What a happy day we are going to have!" said little Daisy, who, because she was the youngest, was the pet of them all.

"I hope we are," said Hugh. "Will Daisy come and see us skate upon the pond?"

"But we are all going to church," said Grace. "It is beautifully decorated, and a new anthem is to be sung. I shall go and hear it. Who will come with me?"

"But it is not Sunday, you know," said Edward; "we can skate first."

"So we can," said Hugh, "and that is what we will do."

In a very few minutes afterward the children were all on or about the pond, screaming with delight.

It is not necessary to tell you all they did, nor how they spent the day. If you will remember the happiest Christmas-day you have ever spent, you will be able to guess how the time passed with these brothers and sisters.

But when the evening came an incident occurred which spoiled the day.

Everything had passed off well and merrily until that time. There had been quite as much feasting as was good for the children, and plenty of games both indoors and out. As soon as it was really dark, the grand event of the evening took place, which was the lighting of the Christmas-tree, and the distribution of the prizes upon it. Even then no complaints were made, although it is very possible that all the children were not quite satisfied. It is a very difficult thing to please everybody, and Mr. and Mrs. Clarence could not always do that with their own children, although they tried. But if any disappointment was felt nothing was said about it.

Later in the evening they had snapdragon. Of course all the children pressed around eagerly enough, and by accident Hugh trod on Frank's toes. It is not pleasant to have one's toes trodden upon, of course, but it is not a thing to make a great fuss about. Frank might have removed his foot, and borne the pain patiently for a minute or two, when all would have been over; but instead of that he pushed Hugh roughly on one side,

and caused him to fall against Willie Wright, who was spending the evening with them. Willie was not a very good-tempered boy, and he complained loudly and fiercely. Frank took his part.

"Hugh is a big, careless fellow, who does not mind whom he hurts," he said.

"He is no more careless than you are," said Grace.

"No one asked you to speak," said Edward, taking Frank's part against his brother and sister.

"Just because Hugh is the oldest, he thinks he may do anything he pleases," said Frank.

"No, he does not," said Hugh, "and all this fuss is your doing, Frank. If you had asked me to move instead of pushing me, it would not have happened."

"Is it likely I was going to wait to do that when you were hurting my foot all the time?"

"I don't believe I hurt you. You are such a coward, that you cannot bear a little pain without crying out like a great baby," said Hugh.

Frank grew more angry still.

"You had better mind what you are saying," he said. "I will not stand any of your ill-treatment if you are a year or two older than I."

"What will you do then?"

"Fight it out."

"Do, Frank, and I will help you."

What words for the evening of Christmas-day!

Lettice came into the room at this moment, and inquired what was the matter.

"Never mind," she said; "enough has been said about it. Hugh did not mean to hurt any one, I am sure. It would have been better, Hugh dear, if you had apologised."

"Why should I apologise when I did not mean to do any mischief? If it had been done on purpose I would have begged pardon, but it was not."

"No," said Frank, scornfully; "Hugh never does anything wrong on purpose."

"Oh, hush!" said Lettice. "Surely you have forgotten what evening it is! If Jesus is in our home spending Christmas with us, do you not think He must be grieved to hear such unloving words spoken on His birthday? Make it up, boys; and come, let us have a new and better game."

Lettice loved to be a peace-maker, but her efforts were not always successful. They were not now. Hugh's face was clouded, Grace was silent, and Frank and the other boys spoiled their good looks by pouting. Lettice was very grieved. She proposed several games, which one or the other rejected.

Seeing how pained she looked, Hugh yielded presently, and the others reluctantly gave way too.

"We will have a game at proverbs. Hugh will go out of the room while we choose one, and then he must return and ask us questions, in our answers to which we must each bring in one word of the proverb."

Hugh went out, and they decided upon a proverb.

But Lettice's plan was not successful.

"Hugh asks us such stupid questions that it is not possible to bring our words in without doing it so that he shall guess," said Frank.

"It is you who are stupid," said Hugh, "or you could frame better answers than you give."

This provoked the others, and for the next minute nothing was heard but mutual fault-finding.

In the midst of the noise Mr. Clarence came in. "If this is the way you are finishing Christmas," said he, "the sooner it is over the better. So you will all go to your rooms at once."

Very unlovely were the children's faces as they separated for the night. No kindly parting words passed between them. They scarcely wished each other good-night; but each went to his room with anger in his heart.

Was it not a sad ending to the day? They had forgotten all about the angels' songs, and about the Saviour who was born on Christmas-day. The happiness that they had expected had been quite broken by their quarrel with each other; and they all sought their beds feeling dissatisfied and miserable.

CHAPTER II.

NEW YEAR'S EVE.

"GRACE, would not you like to sit up to see the old year out and the new year in?" asked Hugh on the evening of the thirty-first of December.

"Yes, I should love it," said Grace.

Of course these brothers and sisters were good friends again, and had almost, though not quite, forgotten their quarrel.

"So should I like it," said Frank.

"I wonder if we may."

"I am almost afraid mamma will not let us. She thinks we ought always to go to bed so early," said Alfred.

"Of course you younger ones ought," said Hugh; "but two or three of us, who are older, might perhaps be allowed to remain up."

"But that would not be fair," said Edward; "we ought all to be treated alike."

"Let us ask mamma," said Grace.

"I know a better plan than that," said Hugh. "Let us find Lettice, and get her to ask for us. If mamma will not consent for our own sakes she will for Lettice's."

"Where is Lettice?"

"Is she not with mamma and papa?"

"No."

"She is in her own room. I saw her go upstairs some time since."

They rushed up one after another, and in their eagerness they opened the door of their sister's room without knocking, and entered. But what they saw there had a great effect upon them. In an instant they became silent and awestruck, looking at one another with questioning eyes.

For Lettice lay upon her bed, with her hair falling over her shoulders, and her face so white that she looked almost as if she might be dead.

She arose from the bed as soon as the children came in, and seeing their frightened faces, tried to smile, and to speak to them. But the words would not be uttered, and the pale lips quivered so in their attempt to smile that one or two of the children began to cry.

The sight of their grief restored Lettice more quickly than anything else would have done. She hastily bathed her face in cold water, and then, looking much more like herself, spoke to them almost merrily.

"You have taken my castle quite by storm; and I was unprepared for such a siege. I wonder what is the reason for it?"

But Hugh still felt most anxious.

"What does it mean, Lettice?"

"That is exactly what I want to know, Hugh. What does it mean—this sudden raid upon my little room?"

"I mean what is the matter with you, Lettice?"

"Matter with me, Hugh? How can you ask? Was not such an arrival enough to scare any one with stronger nerves than mine?"

"Lettice, you are trying to evade me. But I must have an answer. Sister, dear, tell us what is the matter."

A look of pain came into Lettice's face. "Do not ask me, Hugh," she said. "I will tell you some time if I can, but not to-night. Please don't mind; but tell me what you want."

Grace pressed to her sister's side, and put her arms around her. "Surely you will tell me, Lettice."

"Oh, do not ask me, Grace."

Lettice was so evidently distressed that Grace begged her pardon and promised not to tease her. But the children were all surprised and grieved. It was a most wonderful thing to see Lettice thus. She had certainly been

crying, and was nervous and unlike herself still. And Lettice was always so bright and cheerful. She seemed to drive sorrow away from all of them, and even from the house. She was so good-tempered and hopeful, that even the youngest children generally left off crying and began to smile as soon as Lettice talked to them. Her father often said that she had been rightly named, for Lettice signifies joy, and she well deserved the designation. But Hugh could not help thinking that Marah would have suited her better, just now.

"It must be some very great trouble," thought Hugh, "or it would not so affect our Lettice."

"Do you want me to do something, Hugh?"

"Yes, Lettice, if you don't mind. Only it seems too bad to trouble you about it now."

"Let me do it," said Lettice, in a quick tone. "I would rather do it."

"Well, we wanted, just for once, you know, to sit up until the new year begins; and we thought if you would ask mamma for us, she would be so much more likely to consent. Will you?"

Lettice thought for a minute. "It is a very great thing to ask; for it might make you ill."

"Oh, no," said Edward. "We could lie in bed to-morrow morning and rest, and then it would not hurt us."

"Do, Lettice, dear, we should like it so much," said Grace.

"I will ask mamma, but you must not be very much disappointed if she denies our request."

"She will not, if you really wish it."

"I do wish it. There is something I should

like to say to you while we wait for the time to pass."

"About yourself?" inquired Frank, eagerly.

"Not so much about myself as about yourselves," said Lettice.

When the request was made, Mrs. Clarence looked very doubtful.

"Mamma, dear," said Lettice, "I want to say something to them which they will never forget; and, perhaps, it will remain longer in their memories if I say it then."

Mrs. Clarence looked tenderly at her daughter. If the children had been in the room they would have seen that whatever Lettice's trouble was her mother knew all about it.

"They shall remain up if you wish it," she said, gently.

"Thank you, mamma."

The children were delighted when the good news was told to them.

"We will have such a happy time," said Hugh.

"I want it to be rather a serious time," said, Lettice.

"It may be serious, and yet happy," said Grace.

"So it may," replied Lettice; "our merriest times are not always the most happy."

The children all felt a little curious as to what was the subject upon which Lettice wished to talk to them. But she gave them no hint until they were all gathered together in her room before a bright fire at half-past eleven o'clock.

"Now, Lettice," said Alfred, sitting at her feet, "you must make what you have to say interesting, or else I believe I shall fall asleep."

"But you must try not to do that, Alfred; for

if you do you will not see the old year out and the new year in," said Frank.

"You talk as if there were something to see," said Edward; "if we put out the light and look across the fields, do you suppose we shall see the old year take his departure, and the young one make his appearance?"

"Of course not. You know I did not mean anything of the kind."

"If you do not stop talking, how is Lettice to begin?" said Hugh.

There was silence then, and they all looked at their eldest sister.

"Once upon a time——"

"Ah! that is the way to begin," said Grace.

"Do not interrupt," said Hugh.

"Once upon a time there was a man who had a large family."

"Oh! there are plenty of such men."

"But at the time of which I am speaking the man was dying, and he summoned all his children around him. But before he died there was something he had to say to these children, which was exactly the same as what I want to say to you to-night. Well, first of all he told them to fetch a bundle of sticks, and they did so. Then he told them to break the bundle of sticks, and they all tried to obey him, and could not. So he told them to unfasten the bundle, and separate the pieces of wood, and then try to break them. They did so, and in a very short time the sticks were all broken up. And the man told the children that they were like the pieces of wood; all the time they kept together, no one could break or harm them in any way, but if they allowed

themselves to be separated, they would find that they were very weak; and so he taught them in this, his last lesson, that unity is strength."

Lettice stopped, and for a few seconds the brothers and sisters waited. Then Hugh spoke. "Well, Lettie, what a disappointment! We knew that old story long ago. If that is all you have to tell us, I do not think much of it."

"That is too bad of you," said Frank, agreeing with his brother.

But Lettice smiled pleasantly, and then looked so grave that they knew something else was coming.

"It is the lesson which the man taught his children that I want us all to learn to-night," she said. "God has been very good to us in giving us a large family, so that I, for one, feel quite rich in brothers and sisters. And you will agree with me that at present we are quite sure of each other's love. I have not any doubt that you all love me."

There was a general pressing nearer to their sister as she said these words.

"And there is brotherly and sisterly love between each of you, I know. But I want the love to continue. I want you all to make up your minds to *keep together*. Of course you will have other friends; but no one can be to you just what your brothers and sisters are. And you will be so much happier, and more successful too, if you let nothing come between you and one another. I say this because I have noticed signs of other things than love. Sometimes it seems to me that you are even jealous of each other, and so easily vexed that a little thing makes you angry. It ought not to be so, and such feelings will steal

away love sooner than you think. Would it not be terrible if, in years to come, when we are grown up, we should be a divided family, knowing little, and caring less, about each other? And yet if we are quarrelsome now, that is what it may come to."

There was a great silence then for some minutes.

Frank was the first to speak. "I have been often wrong," he said. "I have been jealous of Hugh sometimes because he was the oldest; though, of course, he could not help that." The others made similar confessions.

"We should love one another," said Lettice, gently, "because we cannot tell how long we may all live, and if one were to die, how grieved we should be for all the angry words we had spoken!"

This brought tears into Grace's eyes, and made the boys look very serious.

"Lettice, I will promise you that, so far as I am concerned, we will keep together."

"And so will I," said the others.

"I want you to promise it to God as well as to me," said Lettice, solemnly.

And then they knelt down, and Lettice asked God to bless them, and give them a happy new year, and help them to love one another, and keep the promise which they had made.

Almost directly after Lettice had finished, the bells rang in the new year.

CHAPTER III.

LETTICE.

WHAT was the matter with Lettice ?

The question which the Clarence boys and girls asked themselves and each other was not answered until the day before they all went back to school.

That day was rather a solemn one. Even the morning seemed different from most days, because it was so quiet. When the family met for breakfast they waited a few minutes for Lettice. That in itself was a strange thing, for Lettice used to be always down first. The others who were dressing would often hear her light step along the passage, and her merry voice singing some sweet song. Such a thing as Lettice being late was unheard of before.

When the door opened and she came in, it was with a slow step and a pale face, and the children noticed that their father arose and placed a seat for her.

"I am afraid I have kept you waiting," said Lettice, trying to smile.

"Only for a minute or two," said Mrs. Clarence.

"It is something new to wait for Lettice, though," said Edward. "Are you getting idle, Lettice ?"

"I hope not, Edward ; though I must confess it looks like it," said Lettice.

"If you are as industrious at school as Lettice always was," said Mr. Clarence, "you will not do amiss, Edward."

"But I cannot tell what is the matter with Lettice," remarked persistent Hugh. "Something is wrong, I am sure."

His mother stopped him with a gentle word.

"Be quiet, Hugh. Lettice will be pained if you talk about her. You will know soon enough what is the matter."

To the intense astonishment of Hugh and Grace, three doctors arrived soon after breakfast. At the sight of them Lettice's colour again forsook her, and she trembled very much. Then she and her mother went away with the doctors into another room.

"Lettice must be ill," said Hugh.

"And yet she does not look pale or thin," said Grace.

"Only sometimes her colour changes."

"But then it always did so."

"I hope she is not really unwell. The house would be dull and strange if anything made Lettice silent."

"Poor Lettice! It would be such a trouble to her to be ill, because she is so busy, and loves to run about and do things for everybody."

"Oh, I cannot believe that anything is really the matter. Perhaps mamma is afraid there is, and so a consultation of doctors is being held; but no doubt it is all a mistake, or only mamma's nervousness."

"I hope so. We could not bear that Lettice should be ill."

In the meantime the doctors were speaking cheerfully enough in the other room. They saw that Lettice was frightened, and wished to reassure her. But their opinion was not a favour-

able one, and although they did not tell Lettice so, she felt it.

After they had examined her and talked to her pleasantly, they left. Mr. Clarence met them in the hall.

"Well, gentlemen?" he said.

"I am sorry we cannot give you better news, Mr. Clarence," said one of the doctors. "It is very sad for the poor child, but nothing can be done to cure her, and not much to relieve the suffering that will surely come upon her."

Hugh and Grace heard these words, and heard their father groan.

Then Lettice called him. "Papa, what did the doctors say? Please tell me. I would rather know the truth. Is there any hope for me?"

Mr. Clarence drew his daughter to his side.

"Lettice," he said, "do you remember what the Saviour said when Peter smote the High Priest's servant?"

"Yes, papa," said Lettice, in a low tone. "He said, 'The cup that My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?'"

"It was a very bitter cup, my child, but because it was God's will that He should take it Christ was obedient. I hope the same spirit may be given to you, my Lettice."

Lettice covered her face with her hands, and did not speak. She heard the sorrow in her father's voice, and knew that her mother was weeping. For a little time she felt as if she could not bear it. But presently she said, "I will go to my room for a little time," and she went alone. But One came to her there—the Comforter—to whom none ever appeal in vain.

Very soon Mr. and Mrs. Clarence told the children what was the matter with Lettice. Some disease was in the spine which could never be cured, and which would occasion her great suffering. It was almost certain that she who had been used to run about so swiftly would soon not be able to move at all, but would be compelled to lie always upon a couch. There would be no more walks for them all together over the meadows, or through the woods. Lettice, the dearest of them all, the one who could be least spared, would always have to be left behind. Lettice, who had been so ready to do anything for them, who had such rapid feet and such skilful fingers, would henceforth be a very different girl from the one who had been so devoted to them. But it was not of this they thought. What brought the tears to their eyes was the knowledge that she must suffer. It seemed so hard that Lettice should be the one who was to be afflicted.

"If it had been me, I could have borne it," said Hugh.

"If it had been me it would not have mattered so much," said Grace, tearfully. "I should not be missed as Lettice will. I am of no use to any one, and Lettice is so good to us all."

"Lettice will not be any the less good," said their mother. "And we must remember, my children, that it is God who sends this trouble, and He has given it to Lettice. We must not suppose that we know best. We must pray for Lettice, and comfort her with our love, and though we cannot in the least tell how it can be, yet it is possible that even this trouble may in some way be changed into a blessing."

It was evening before Lettice again saw her brothers and sisters. She and her mother spent the afternoon together. Lettice could talk to that dearest friend better than to any other.

"I cannot as yet say, 'Thy will be done,' mamma, though I hope that God will help me soon to do so."

"He will, my child. He knows how hard it is, but He will help you. Are you afraid of the suffering, Lettice?"

"Yes, mamma; I do not like to think of the pain. I know it will be hard to bear; but what troubles me most is the disappointment."

"How are you disappointed, Lettice?"

"Since I learnt to love the Saviour, mamma, I have thought of things so differently. I do not care so much about my own pleasure, but I so long to do something to make others happy. It has been such joy to help you and papa and render little services to the boys, and assist Grace with her work. There are many things that I meant to do, and my life was growing very full and happy. I cannot bear to think of giving it all up, and being only a trouble to you. I shall want waiting upon myself, and I shall never be able to do anything again."

"Oh, yes, you will, my child. There are many good things ready for you. If you are anxious to serve God, and do what is right, you will certainly be helped to do so. You will not feel that you are a trouble to us, because such will not be the case. And you may be sure that God, who is laying this trouble upon you, will send some ameliorating circumstances too. And, Lettice, strange as it may seem to you now, I believe it is

true that your life may be as full and happy, though you are obliged to spend it upon the sofa, as if you were able to move about as you wished."

Lettice thought of her mother's words many times after they were spoken. They helped her to hope on, and strive to be brave and resigned. But on this day she thought most of all of other words which she had learned long ago, and which now she was only beginning to understand. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee." "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me."

In the evening, when Lettice again met her brothers and sisters, she was the most cheerful of them all. They had very grave faces, and it seemed as if they could not talk as merrily as usual about the coming quarter.

"We shall not know how to attend to our lessons properly as we think that you are at home suffering, Lettice," said Hugh.

"But you must not think that I am always in pain, Hugh dear, because I shall not be. There will be times when I shall be quite free and happy as ever. And I want you to feel that, because I do so little, there is the more reason why you should do all you can. You are the oldest boy, Hugh, and our father looks to you to help him as soon as you are old enough. I look to you too; I shall need the thought of my brother to cheer me."

Hugh looked very grave. "I am not at all good, you know, Lettice; I did not do as well as I might have done last quarter."

"But you will do better next, Hugh."

"I don't know; I am afraid to promise."

"But you will try. And look after the other boys. Frank and Edward will need the good example of their elder brother."

"Oh, I hope they will not follow me, Lettice," said Hugh, feeling rather uncomfortable. "If you could be always with them they would no doubt be all right. But I shall do them no good."

Lettice smiled, and looked into Hugh's face with her clear eyes.

"I am not in the least afraid to trust you, Hugh."

"I am afraid to trust myself."

"But God will take care of you. I shall often think of you; there will be little beside that I can do."

It was a sorrowful parting. But it was soon over. The boys went away to school, Hugh, Frank, and Edward together. Grace left by the same train, but her journey was only half as long as that of her brothers.

Lettice stayed behind with little Daisy and their mother, and so they all began the real work of the year.

CHAPTER IV.

AT SCHOOL.

"Is everything ready?"

"Yes; we are to go into Hugh Clarence's room this evening."

"We could not have a better place. Hugh is a capital fellow."

"Yes, and not often short of money."

"How many are going?"

"Six or eight, I suppose. Hugh was told to expect us at ten o'clock."

"Is Smith gone to bed?"

"Not yet; but he looks very tired. It will be safe enough in another ten minutes."

A quarter of an hour afterwards there was a stealthy gathering of lads in Hugh's room, where they were evidently expected.

After a greeting which they dared not make as noisy as they wished, Hugh took from a box a bottle of wine and some cakes. Then he heated some water over the gas, and several of the boys lighted cigars and began to smoke.

"I suppose you have taken every precaution to shut in the light, Hugh, so that no one passing could see a glimmer?"

"Oh, yes, I have stopped up the chinks."

"I wish we could shut in sound as well. It's a shame that we cannot have a song and a chorus. Hugh could entertain us; he has a good voice."

"Never mind, he can tell us a tale instead."

Now, Hugh, as you are the host, you are bound to interest us in some way."

"Do not be in a hurry," said Hugh.

"That is what that brother of yours is always telling me," remarked one of the boys. "Do you know, Hugh, that Frank is deeply in my debt?"

"How is that?"

"I have lent him money at different times. I cannot think what he does with it. He is too young to have expensive tastes."

"You should not have lent him the money," said Hugh. "He cannot pay you."

"But his brother can."

"It is not likely that I shall do anything of the sort."

"I think it will be very dishonourable if you don't. I should not have lent it to him if he had not been your brother."

"Do not disturb the harmony of the meeting," said one of the boys. "Hugh will pay you; he is too good a fellow to allow any one to suffer for helping a brother of his. Let us have a game."

But Hugh felt anxious and angry. He had his suspicions that Frank was not all that he should be, and it vexed him. He was not, as you have seen, very careful to set a good example, but his own ill-conduct did not make him lenient to his brother's faults.

As soon as the lads had quietly crept away to their own rooms Hugh was obliged to open the window, and sit for some minutes shivering in the cold, in order that the ill scents with which the place had been filled might be blown away.

He was very uncomfortable, and the worst of

all was, that he could not be at peace with himself.

In his pocket was a short note written in pencil by his sister Lettice. He had scarcely allowed himself to read it; he had done little more than cast his eye over it before he crumpled it up, and put it away, and yet he knew quite well what its contents were.

"I hope you are happy and prosperous, my dear brother, and that you are surrounding Frank and Edward with all good influences."

That sentence, quite against his will, came into Hugh's mind now, and with it another thought.

"If Lettice knew how I have spent the evening, and who are my companions, how she would cry. Poor Lettice! And what a wretch I am! Losing my place in the class, running the risk of being expelled from the school, letting Frank and Edward get into any mischief they please, all to spend an hour or two of so-called fun with a set of boys who flatter me for the sake of what they can get out of me."

Hugh closed his window and got into bed, but not to sleep. His conscience, once aroused, troubled him very perseveringly. He began to hate himself, and the course he had chosen. He thought of Frank, and wished it were daylight that he might at once upbraid him. And then he remembered that as he was so much worse than his brother, he had no right to find fault with him, and, thoroughly miserable, he began to cry.

How was it that Hugh had come to this? Had he forgotten his sister's words?

No; but Hugh was not steadfast. When he went back to school a number of boys persuaded

him to join them in various pleasures, and he had not the firmness to resist. So things had gone from bad to worse, until this had happened of which you have read. He despised himself for his meanness and cowardice, and for the falsehoods which he was acting. And as he lay in bed, he wished, oh, so earnestly, that he had strength to overcome and turn to better ways.

"I wonder, if Lettice knew all, what she would advise me to do? If I keep on with these boys I shall certainly go from bad to worse, and there will be a fine ending to it all one day! But surely I am not obliged to remain as I am. What did that prodigal son do of whom I read in the Bible?"

Hugh knew what he did. A gentle voice kept prompting Hugh in the very words of Scripture: "I will arise and go to my Father."

A little time longer he lay in bed, and then he sprang out and knelt down and prayed.

There was no one to hear poor Hugh's self-accusations. He did not spare himself. He confessed all his sins, telling God many things which he would have been ashamed for any one else to know. And he prayed earnestly for strength, that he might not again fall into temptation.

That night saved Hugh Clarence. He was certainly going the way to ruin, but now he repented of his sin, and besought help from God. He found, however, that it is much more easy to go into wrong habits than to get out of them. He had slipped downhill, but he had to fight his way back.

As soon as he could he spoke to his brother.

"Frank, how much do you owe Alfred Morris?"

I am very sorry that you have borrowed money of him at all."

"If I have, it is no worse, nor half so bad as things that you have done," said Frank, angrily.

"I know it is not," said Hugh, so quietly that Frank was surprised. "I am not going to quarrel with you, Frank, for you know we promised Lettice that we would keep together. I will pay Morris if I can, but I hope you will not again take his money."

"He ought not to have told you about it."

"He wanted the money back. Oh, Frank, I am so miserable! I feel how badly I have been going on ever since I came back to school, and I am heartily ashamed of it."

"You are not well, are you?" inquired Frank, curiously. It was so strange to hear his brother talk in this way that he could not at all understand it.

"Well? I am well enough in body," said Hugh, "though I am as wretched as I can be. But I mean to turn over a new leaf. What would Lettice say, Frank, if she knew about you and me?"

"I suppose she would break her heart. But I have not been so bad as you have, Hugh."

"I hope not, Frank; but I hope we shall both be better than we have been. I meant to do differently this quarter, but all my good resolutions have come to nothing again."

"It is hard to be good here," said Frank. "I wish we were away; there are so many boys of the wrong sort, and so few to help one to be good."

"Yes; but I expect that will be the case wherever we go. I think it is much more easy to

be bad than good. But we will help one another, shall we, Frank?"

"Do you really mean it, Hugh? or do you intend to be just the same yourself after you have persuaded me to turn over a new leaf?"

Hugh proved that he meant it that night by doing a brave thing. He kept to his lessons until it was the usual time for his companions to assemble. Then he went to them.

"That is right. Come in, Hugh."

"No, thank you. I have come to tell you that I have made up my mind not to go on with this any longer. It is not right, and I have been feeling it for a long time. It only makes me wretched, so I should be foolish to run the risk and waste my money over it."

"Oh! Hugh Clarence turned saint!"

"Whatever I have turned is an improvement upon what I have been. I was fast becoming both a liar and a drunkard."

"What nonsense!"

"I do not think it is nonsense. We have been disobeying the rules of the school in almost all respects, and not one of us would like to take the consequences if we were found out. Of course there would be a terrible punishment."

"But then we shall not be found out unless you are going to turn sneak yourself, Hugh."

"There is no fear of that. I shall not tell, for I have been one of you; but it is almost sure to get to the master's ears some time or other. And whether it does or not, the thing is wrong, and I for one shall do it no longer."

Most of the boys sneered—few believed that he really meant what he said.

"We shall keep on as usual, Hugh Clarence, and of course if you wish to forsake your old friends you can do so; but it is too bad of you, for you have gone as far as any of us."

"I know I have, and have spent all my money and forfeited the master's good opinion into the bargain. But I have come to my senses at last, and I advise you to think the matter over seriously before it is too late. Good-night."

"We shall not fill up your place, Hugh. We shall have you back again before long."

"Do you think so? I hope you are mistaken."

In order to strengthen his good resolution, Hugh wrote to his sister, and told her a little of what had happened. It was painful to him to write it, but he thought if Lettice knew the truth she would write letters which would help him, and would pray for him more specially.

Hugh had a very trying time just then. He missed the excitement and mirth to which he had been used. He tried to apply himself diligently to his studies, but they seemed dry and difficult. At first the lads who had been his companions in wrong-doing tried to persuade him to alter his mind. They were continually suggesting some new amusement, and Hugh, who liked fun and pleasure, found it exceedingly difficult to keep steadily on in the upward way. But he persevered, and learnt not only to say "No," but to mean it. After a time the lads got tired of asking him, and then they were angry with him. None of them would be at all pleasant or friendly. They shunned him as if he, not they, were doing wrong. And Hugh, who had been their favourite, felt the change very keenly.

But at that time something happened which gave him fresh subject for thought.

He noticed that one of the teachers singled out his brother Edward, and often invited him to spend an evening in his room.

CHAPTER V.

EDWARD.

ON the evening when Hugh Clarence came to himself, and resolved to amend his ways, Mr. Davis, one of the teachers in the school, sat in his room looking over some exercises. The occupation was not new, and it was not particularly amusing. But as he read one of the books his face grew brighter; and he evidently felt more than ordinary interest in the contents of the pages, for he read them through twice before he relinquished the book.

He sat thoughtfully looking into the fire for some minutes, and then he rose and went into the room where most of the boys were assembled. For this hour they were all allowed to do as they pleased, and they were amusing themselves in various ways. Some were writing letters, a few were studying, but most were engaged in some game. One boy alone, of the whole number, was apparently doing nothing. Edward Clarence sat with his arms folded, looking into space. A

general hush fell upon the boys as Mr. Davis appeared, but Edward was so lost in thought that he did not observe it. Mr. Davis went to him, and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"Edward, I should like to have a few minutes' conversation with you. Will you come to my room?"

Edward followed the master, wondering vaguely why he was wanted.

It was a pleasant room into which Mr. Davis took him. A bright fire was burning, and the lamp on the table gave a subdued light which was pleasant to the eyes after the glare of the school-room.

Edward looked around, taking in at a glance the furniture, the fire, the light, and especially the shelves, well filled with books. Edward had very quiet-looking eyes, but they saw everything, for they were *noticing* eyes. When they had made the circuit of the room they were raised inquiringly to the master's face.

"Sit down, Edward," said he. "You were not doing anything when I came into the room, were you?"

"No, sir."

"Then I did not interrupt you. I have been looking through the exercises, and I am very pleased with yours. Did it take long to write?"

"No, sir; about an hour and a half."

"But you knew when you sat down what you were going to say?"

"Oh, yes. I always think the exercise through before I write it."

"I thought so. That is a good plan. Do you think the subject over merely, or do you decide

even in your thoughts what words you will use?"

"I think I leave the words until I begin to write. I plan what I will say, and not always how I shall say it."

"You are able to express your thoughts very clearly and easily. You seem to have a good command over the words of our language."

Mr. Davis saw Edward's quiet eyes suddenly flash, and knew that his remarks were appreciated. But Edward said nothing.

"I think you will be able to turn your power of expression to good account," continued Mr. Davis.

"Do you, sir? I hope I may," said Edward.

"Nothing can be done without persevering work, you know; but I have asked you to come here this evening that I might offer you any help that I can. I shall be glad to see you at any time when you have leisure, and my books are quite at your service."

"Oh, Mr. Davis, thank you very much."

"It will be well to read the best books only, so that you may understand not merely the modes of thought, but of expression, which clever writers adopt. What do you mean to do when you are a man, Edward?"

Edward Clarence did not often blush, but the colour dyed his face at the question which was put to him so suddenly, and he hesitated to reply.

"Would you like to be an author?" asked Mr. Davis, presently.

"I should like it very well," said Edward.

"Very well? That is not an enthusiastic way

of expressing yourself. I suppose there is something else which you would like better?"

"There is, but——"

"Never mind, Edward. Do not tell me if you would rather not. No doubt it is good and honourable work which you intend to do, and I wish you all success in it. Let me help you, if I can at any time do so."

"But I should like to tell you, Mr. Davis, although I have not told any one what is in my thoughts. I should like to be a speaker. I think it is such a grand thing to be able to say what is worth listening to by thousands of people. It seems to me that the life of a man who can interest and benefit numbers by his words must be better and nobler than any other."

Mr. Davis looked at the boy's face with some surprise. It was so flushed and eager that it was evident he felt deeply what he was saying.

"I am not sure that it is necessarily the noblest life," said he. "But there is no doubt that an able and popular speaker has great power in the world, at this time especially. But of course power is only desirable when it is properly used. A speaker can do immense harm as well as great good."

"Yes, I understand that, sir. But I hope, if I am ever a speaker, that I shall say only right things. I am only afraid that I shall never have my wish."

"Why not?"

"It is only clever men who can gain large audiences, and address them worthily."

"But there is no reason why you should not be a clever man, is there? You are young yet. This

is your time of preparation. Make good use of it, and then when you are older you will reap the reward. I believe that, with God's blessing, a boy may always become what he really desires. If you are resolute, and persevering, and are willing to deny yourself, and keep steadily on, you may be a speaker."

"Do you think so indeed, sir? I am so glad; I will try my best."

The last words were spoken very quietly, but very sincerely. Edward certainly meant what he said at the time. But everything would depend upon his power of persistence. Many a boy means great things who never does anything of importance. It is so much more easy to resolve than to work, as Edward would soon discover for himself. On this evening, however, he feared no discouragements, but felt quite strong and brave, and hopeful of success. Mr. Davis allowed him some time for thought, and then he spoke to him again.

"Well, Edward, I am glad to have had this talk with you. I shall watch your progress with more than ordinary interest. I hope it will be altogether an upward one. May God bless you, my boy, and make you a blessing to the world, and help you to be pure and steadfast, and to serve Him in all that you do. Now, look over my books, and see if there is one you would like to read particularly."

Edward looked with pleasure at the titles. He saw, not one but many which he knew would interest him, but chose a volume of the *Spectator*, that he might read Addison's essays. "Thank you very much for your kindness, sir," he said, as

he left Mr. Davis's room. "I will make the most of the privilege you have given me. If you will excuse me, I should like to ask you to say nothing to any one of what I have told you to-night. I would rather not talk about it. If I fail, it would be so bad to have made any pretences beforehand; and if I succeed, people will know soon enough."

"Does your brother Hugh know what you wish?"

"No one knows."

"Well, I will keep your secret."

"Thank you."

Edward wondered as he went back to the schoolroom, if he ought to tell Hugh. But he decided to keep his own counsel. Hugh looked upon Edward as rather an unimportant member of the family; he was neither the oldest, nor the next to the oldest, and he was not the youngest either. No particular interest centred in him. He was, as I have said, a quiet boy. He had not made himself famous, as many boys do, by being mischievous. He had not so large a supply of animal spirits as the rest; and indeed there was nothing in him which drew attention to himself. He knew that he had been sent to school in order to gain an education. Nothing else was expected of him. He was conscientious, and tried to do right always. He pursued his studies more eagerly than was generally understood, because he loved them. But so long as he did his lessons creditably, he knew that no particular notice would be taken of him. "So I will say nothing about my extra studies until I have accomplished something, and neither Hugh nor Frank will

observe that I am more busy than I have been," he thought.

Edward was a long time that night before he slept. He had been so excited by his conversation with Mr. Davis that he could not become quiet and restful even after he was in bed. He lay awake for nearly two hours thinking. His heart had been greatly stirred within him, and the boy looked on to the future with many hopes.

"I will not be content with little things ; I will be a great lecturer," he thought. "I will speak against all that is bad and mean and dishonest, and plead for what is true and honourable, and will make people happy. If God will help me, I will not waste a year of my life. I will do something that shall make the world better. I will take the part of the poor and the oppressed. I will make people ashamed of being hard-hearted and cruel and false. I will——"

Edward stopped in the midst of his flights of fancy, and tried to sleep. When at last sleep stole over him, he had a pleasant dream. You have perhaps observed that we do not generally dream of that which has most interested us during the day. Our dreams are usually connected with subjects of which we have only taken a passing notice. Edward's dream was an exception to this rule. He dreamed that he was standing on a platform addressing a crowd. At first he spoke gently and earnestly, and he saw that many women and some men were moved to tears by his words. Then he grew impassioned and eager, and as he spoke the people were so roused that they arose to their feet and shouted, while men waved their hats and women their handkerchiefs ; and one

lad, very much like Hugh, opened an umbrella, and waved it over the heads of those nearest to him. This incident was so ludicrous that Edward laughed, and the laugh awoke him. But he was delighted with his dream.

"I wonder if it will ever come true," he thought. "At least I will try to make the dream a reality."

So for the next few weeks Edward spent almost all his evenings in Mr. Davis's room, and Hugh began to observe, and wonder what it meant.



CHAPTER VI.

"HOW IS LETTICE?"

LETTICE lay upon a couch. There was no help for it. As long as she could she resisted the pain and weakness, but they at length overcame her. One evening her father came in. No one had thought of his slippers. Lettice knew that outside the weather was cold and wet; and as she looked into her father's face she saw that he was worried and tired. She would like to have met him in the hall, and helped to remove his coat, as she always used to do; but when she saw that his slippers were not ready, she felt as if she could not bear to lie still. So she raised herself; but a sharp, swift pain compelled her to lie down again. Tears filled her eyes, not because of the pain, but because of her helplessness. Her father saw the

change in her face, and came full of concern to her side.

"Are you not as well, Lettice? What is the matter, my child?"

"I am no worse, papa, thank you. I wanted to fetch your slippers."

"Oh, never mind, darling. Surely a great strong man is able to fetch his own slippers. You must not attempt anything of the kind." He stooped and kissed her. "You must be good, and not trouble yourself because you cannot do as you wish, you know. It is our turn to wait upon you now. Do you want any slippers fetched?"

He spoke cheerily, and poor Lettice tried to smile; but she could not quite help feeling that her lot was a hard one. She had an active temperament. She liked moving quickly, and filling the hours with work; but instead of being busy in all the rooms, rendering eager service to any who wanted it, she was obliged to lie in one place and do nothing. Of course she could read; but she grew tired of reading, and it did not satisfy her. She lived in a world where there was much to do, and she longed to be at work. So you will understand that the trouble she had was a very great one.

When she had retired that night her father and mother talked about her.

"Poor Lettice feels her helplessness very much," said Mr. Clarence.

"Yes," said his wife. "I think it troubles her even more than her sufferings. I wish there were something which she could do, and which would make her feel that she is still useful."

"Do any of her friends call to see her?"

"Oh, yes, many come and inquire after her; but I have feared that it might excite her too much to receive them. Now, however, I think perhaps it will be better to invite them to see her."

"A pleasant visitor would no doubt relieve the tedium which she must feel."

It was in consequence of this conversation that when Jessie Vale called to ask the usual question, "How is Lettice?" she was invited to see her.

The two had been friends for some time. They had played together, and gone to school together, and had many a serious talk together.

"I am so glad to see you, Jessie," said Lettice. "I have wished I might do so many times, but mamma thought it better that I should keep quiet."

"Are you not tired of being quiet?"

"Almost. But it is no use getting tired. You know that I am not likely to get better?"

"I know that the doctors think so, but I do not believe that they are right. You know, Lettice, they are often mistaken."

"Yes; but I fear that they are correct in the opinion they have formed of my case. But we shall see."

"Yes; and I cannot help hoping that you will yet be able to walk to the forest with me again. But, Lettice, how comfortable you are here. I have just seen such a sad sight. Mamma had heard that a poor woman was ill in East Street, and she asked me to take her a little money. The woman and her two children were in the top room of a small house. She was lying on the floor, only covered by a ragged blanket, and the

children, who were sitting beside her, had only a few old things upon them, no shoes or stockings, nor any warm petticoats. The woman appeared so thankful for the money, and I am sure she must be dreadfully poor. I cannot tell you how miserable she seemed."

"Poor woman, I am sorry for her. It is bad enough to be ill with every comfort. I cannot tell what it must be to be ill and poor too. God is very good to me."

"Have you heard from Hugh lately?"

"Yes; the last letter I received was very nice. I think Hugh will try to do all that is right."

"And Grace?"

"Grace is working hard at her studies. I expect she will become quite an accomplished young lady."

"I am glad of that. But I promised Mrs. Clarence that my visit should be a short one. Good-bye, Lettice. May I come again?"

"Do, please. I feel no worse, but rather better for your visit."

When Jessie had left, Lettice lay for some time thinking. Presently she said, "Mamma, is there an old left-off skirt of Daisy's that I may have?"

"Yes, Lettice, no doubt I can find you one. Why do you want it?"

"Jessie has been telling me such a sad story of a poor woman who is ill, and whose children are scarcely covered from the cold, and I thought I might be able to mend some garment, and make it wearable for one of them."

"I will see what I can find."

Mrs. Clarence found a warm skirt that wanted a new band and several other things done to it.

"Do you think you can work as you lie on the couch?" she asked Lettice.

"Oh, yes, mamma; I am sure I can do all that needs to be done to it. Jessie will soon come again, and then she can take it to the woman."

Lettice became so interested in her work, that she felt quite light-hearted and happy. You may be sure that everything was done as it should be, and the buttons especially were firmly sewn on. Before night the little skirt had been made into a very decent garment, whole, and warm, and comfortable. When next Jessie called it was given to her.

"Will you take this to the poor woman, Jessie? I hope it will fit one of the children," said Lettice.

"It will fit the elder one beautifully," said Jessie; "and I will take it at once, and come and tell you what they say."

Jessie returned with a bright face.

"You would never guess how thankfully it was received, Lettice. I put it on the child myself, and the little fellow danced for joy. I wish we could manufacture another, and a couple of frocks."

"I wonder if mamma has any old dresses which she will give me?"

"We have. But I should not know how to make them up."

"I think I could easily do that."

"Lettice, may I bring some articles here, and work with you? If it would not tire you, I should like it so much."

"It would not tire me, and I should enjoy doing something of the kind, if mamma does not object."

"May I ask her?"

Jessie asked her, and returned shortly.

"Mrs. Clarence says I can come for an hour every day until we have done what we wish, unless it should make you worse."

"I am so glad. Let us begin to-morrow."

The next day Jessie came, bringing a parcel, and the two girls were soon busily at work. The hour was too short; but Lettice had nimble fingers, and although she could not work as quickly as if she had been sitting up, yet she did the best she could.

The next day a mutual friend, Annie Lowe, called, while Lettice and Jessie were at work. She looked rather puzzled, so Jessie explained.

"Oh," said Annie, "how much I should like to help you. I cannot cut out, but I can work quickly. I have my thimble in my pocket. Let me do something."

Of course the two gladly consented. Three pairs of industrious hands can accomplish something, even in the short space of an hour.

"I wish I might come every day, too," said Annie.

"I shall be pleased to have you," said Lettice; "come again to-morrow."

The next day Jessie and Annie came, and each asked permission to bring a friend.

In that way a sewing circle was formed, which, as I shall tell you, did good in many respects.

The first result was that the poor woman and her children were comfortably clothed.

"I feel as if I shall get better, now that I see my children so happy and cared for," said the woman. "I hope the young lady who first thought

of it may get well too. I pray every day that God will bless her."

When Jessie told this to Lettice it cheered her greatly.

"After all, I need not be quite useless," she said.

"But, Lettice, in going to see this woman I have discovered others who need help almost as much as she did. Do you think we could keep on working?"

"I should be glad if we could," replied Lettice; "but I am afraid our materials will soon be exhausted."

"I have several other garments which I can bring. Mamma has two dresses which might be made up into children's frocks; and I may have some old jackets that have been worn by my brothers, and which might be mended and altered so as to do nicely for smaller boys."

"That is very good. Mamma can supply us with a few other things yet."

"And each of the workers can bring something."

"Yes; I do not see why we may not hope for a constant supply, for of course things are continually wearing out."

"And we might each contribute a little money as well as time, and so purchase some articles entirely new."

"I will tell you what I have been thinking about. You know that in cases of illness it is very necessary to have plenty of clean linen. But poor people cannot get a good supply. Mamma has told me that they sometimes find it impossible to change the sheets as often as they should be changed. Would it not be nice if we were to buy

some linen and calico, and make them up into sheets and nightdresses, and lend them to poor people who were suddenly taken ill?"

"It would be delightful, Lettice. That is, indeed, a good thought. We will tell the other girls, and I am quite sure they will be as pleased with the suggestion as I am."

"But," said Mrs. Clarence, who was in the room, "I fear that you cannot all continue to give an hour each day to this work without neglecting other duties. Will it not be better to arrange to meet twice a week instead of every day?"

"I am afraid it will be better," said Jessie, "for it is not possible to do everything at home, and yet work here for an hour; but I am sorry, because we have had such happy times together."

But it was thought necessary to adopt the suggestion of Mrs. Clarence; and after that time six or eight girls met twice a week in Lettice's room.

They thought most of the good which their work would do; but I scarcely think that was the greatest good. Of course, the garments which they so deftly repaired or made were exceedingly acceptable to women and children who were suffering from sickness or poverty. But the girls themselves were gaining profit of which they were only half conscious. They received some excellent lessons in needlework, and in the art of cutting out. Lettice, being the oldest of a family, had been well trained by her mother. She knew how to make the best of small quantities, and understood the best methods of fitting dresses and making them look well. So Lettice was by common consent considered the head and instructress of the party. And Lettice was very

particular. She would not allow any work to be done badly or carelessly. She was patient and painstaking, and she required the same qualities in all her co-workers. And so the girls who were inclined to be slovenly gradually formed better habits, and remembered the old saying, that "Whatever is worth doing at all, is worth doing well." And that was a good thing for them. But what was better still, Lettice was imperceptibly exerting a quiet but very powerful influence over them. Her simple, unostentatious piety, the patience with which she uncomplainingly bore her sufferings, her gentle thoughtfulness for others, the truth and courage which made her always take the part of right against wrong, had their effect upon her companions. They found that after that hour spent with Lettice they could not engage in utterly frivolous conversation. They began to realise that there is something even for girls which is quite as interesting and more important than pleasure, and dress, and vanity. They scarcely knew why, but they had better desires and purer impulses than before, and felt that they could not again be satisfied to live useless lives.

And so Lettice was doing much more than she knew, as she lay upon the sofa in her room.

CHAPTER VII.

A SURPRISE FOR HUGH.

"I HAVE something to propose to you," said Mr. Davis, one afternoon, at the close of the day's lessons in school. "All lads should learn how to speak well in public. Of course, you will follow various occupations. Some of you will be farmers, some merchants, and some professional men. But you will all be called upon occasionally to speak, and a little practice in the art now will be of service to you then. Besides, it is of the utmost importance that you should learn to think; and as no one can speak well who does not think well, what I have to suggest will do you good in this respect too. So, for these and many other reasons, I propose that we should form a discussion class, and that an hour of one evening in each week shall be set apart for a meeting of all the thoughtful boys who care to avail themselves of it; and that at this meeting, subject to some rules which we can make, any lad who has something to say shall be at liberty to speak. What is your opinion?"

Immediately there was a chorus of assenting voices. The boys caught eagerly at the idea.

"It will be capital fun, and develop any talents that we may have too," said one boy.

"It will be one of the most interesting things in connection with the school," said another.

"I suppose we shall select a subject previously

to our meeting, sir ?" inquired a third of Mr. Davis.

"Yes, certainly, in order that you may have a little time to think it over."

"I wish we were to begin this evening," said a boy, rubbing his hands with glee.

"Of course, it will be restricted to the boys in the first class," remarked Hugh Clarence.

"No," said Mr. Davis; "I think it should be open to the whole school. The very youngest boys perhaps would not care to be present, but all the others may attend if they please."

This was the only part of the arrangement that did not satisfy all the boys. Those who were in the higher classes did not at all approve of the privilege being extended to those who were in the lower ones.

"Of course," said Hugh, "it will spoil the whole thing if it may not be kept select. It is not likely that we shall care to waste our time in listening to any rubbish which little boys who ought to be at play may please to say. I for one shall be disinclined to join the class if that is to be allowed."

"Perhaps when Mr. Davis knows how deeply we feel this he will not press it," said one.

"Mr. Davis does not often alter his mind," said another.

"I cannot think why he should wish to throw it open," said Hugh.

"The younger scholars will have so many more opportunities than we shall of improving themselves, and it is not to be expected that, however clever they may be for their age, they will be able to take part in any discussion worthily."

"Let us memorialise Mr. Davis," suggested one of the boys.

"Yes; that is a good idea," said another.

"We will draw up a sort of petition, and get every boy in the first class to sign it."

"Will you do it, Hugh Clarence?"

"No, I would rather not; one of you can do it better."

"Come to my room, and let us do it together, this evening."

"Agreed. A few of us will write it, and then we will lose no time in getting the signatures of the boys."

That evening, accordingly, some of the first boys, with pencils and note-books, met together in order to compose a few sentences which should convey, with great distinctness, their wishes. It took them some time; and, indeed, the first discussion may be said to have been held over this memorial, for it is very seldom that half-a-dozen boys can agree upon any matter without first bringing plenty of objections.

At last, however, it was finished.

"It is perfect," said some.

"It is not perfect, but it will do," said others.

It was presented, in due form, to Mr. Davis, who received the deputation kindly, but declared that he could not accede to their request.

They tried, as much as they dared, to persuade him, but he was very firm.

"I have a particular reason for wishing that the younger boys may attend if they please," he said.

So the matter was settled. Some of the seniors

said they would not belong to the class at all if little boys were to be admitted.

But as the evening for the commencement of the discussion drew near these boys changed their minds, and resolved that they would not act so unwisely as to shut themselves out of what would be, not only pleasant, but useful.

A preliminary meeting was held, at which certain resolutions were passed. It was first resolved that the meeting should be free for all-comers to express their opinions. It was secondly resolved that each speaker should not exceed ten minutes, excepting he who should open the subject, but that he might, if necessary, speak for fifteen minutes. It was also decided that all personal references should be rigidly excluded; and that if any speaker so far forgot himself as to lose his temper, he should be immediately requested to withdraw. Several other resolutions were proposed and carried; then officers were appointed, and the meeting separated. But before the lads left Mr. Davis suggested the following subject for the first discussion:—"War: is it the best means of settling disputes between nations?"

Of course the first meeting was most eagerly looked forward to; and the room in which they had arranged to meet was crowded. Mr. Davis had been appointed chairman, and he took his seat with evident pleasure. He uttered a few sentences only, assuring the lads of his sympathy and expressing a wish that great good might result from the discussions which that night were inaugurated.

It had been arranged that the first boy in the school should make the first speech. He did so,

declaring that war was not only the best, but the only means by which antagonistic nations could settle their quarrels.

"Nor is that on the whole to be regretted," said he. "The loss of life appears at first sight a great and unmitigated evil, but it is not so. Life is always short, and men are content to lose a few years for their own glory and the good of their country. A soldier's lot is a sublime one; and brave deeds done in warfare have left us a host of heroes."

Loud applause followed his speech, to which of course exceptions were taken by many of the boys. They followed in rapid succession, so that the interest which was at first excited continued unabated until the end. For a long time the first class boys only spoke. But as the meeting was drawing to a close, Mr. Davis intimated that one of the juniors would speak. And then, to the unbounded surprise of all, and especially of Hugh, Edward Clarence arose.

At first no one seemed much disposed to listen to him, but before he had spoken many words he had succeeded in riveting the earnest attention of them all. It was, as they afterwards agreed, the speech of the evening, for it was decidedly the best. At first Edward was apparently nervous, but the evident scorn and indifference of the boys seemed to steady him. Quietly and forcibly he disposed of the arguments of James Woodward, the lad who had first spoken, contending that nothing could make war either beneficial or expedient; that it was not a rational way of settling disputes, that a soldier's life was by no means so grand as was represented, and that the

pomp and pageantry of war were only to hide its ghastly terrors. He declared that it was altogether contrary to the spirit and teaching of Christ, and that Christian people were therefore never justified in engaging in it. He concluded his remarks by a personal appeal to them to resolve, while they were young, that they would never be warriors themselves, and that they would do all in their power to exterminate the war spirit from the nation. "And if you cannot do that, you can at least have the satisfaction of refusing to fight, and of knowing that no fields have been trampled down, no home ruined, no woman made a widow, or child an orphan by any murderous act of yours."

When Edward resumed his seat some seconds passed before there was any demonstration of feeling, and then there was such applause as expressed the genuine admiration of the boys. But Hugh sat still. He was so surprised that he did not know what to do or say. Had one told him that Edward could thus speak he certainly would have ridiculed the idea, but he could not doubt the evidence of his own senses. As soon as the meeting had broken up the lads thronged around Edward to express their gratification, and to congratulate him upon his powers. But Hugh walked away alone, feeling that he would rather not speak to any one.

But just before bedtime a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and looking up he met Edward's eyes.

"Hugh, are you vexed with me?" he inquired.

"Vexed, Edward," cried Hugh, in a voice strangely broken by emotion, "how could I be

vexed with you? I am astonished beyond all expression, for you are so young, and—you will not mind my speaking plainly?—I never thought you had anything in you. But I cannot tell you how proud I feel of you, Ned. I think it is wonderful, and I feel sure that you will do great things when you grow up. I wish father and mother, and especially Lettice, could have heard you. How delighted they would have been."

Edward felt his brother's words of praise, and especially his reference to the dear ones at home, very deeply.

"I wish they were here, but if ever they hear me speak I hope there will be something better for them to hear than what I have said to-night," he said.

"Did Mr. Davis know before?"

"Know what?"

"That you could speak."

"He knew that I wished to learn."

"Then that was the reason why he insisted upon the juniors joining this class."

"I cannot tell. He has been very kind to me, and has encouraged me to persevere."

"Oh, Edward, how strange it is that you should go beyond Frank or me."

"I have not gone beyond you. The only thing that makes you think so is that I am younger than either of you."

It was time to say "Good night," and the brothers parted with a fervent hand-clasp.

"God bless you, Edward. I shall pray for your success. I feel sure you will be the clever one of the family, and make us all happy by your wonderful achievements."

"Oh, no," said Edward, as much astonished at Hugh's praise as Hugh had been at his speech. "I shall do nothing wonderful, and you must not make me vain to begin with."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### MONEY-BOXES.

THE next holiday, though short, was a happy one. It is not altogether pleasant for brothers and sisters to be separated, but it does make their meeting again more delightful. The Clarence boys and girls counted the days as the holidays approached, and longed for them, more because of the family meeting which took place then, than for any other reason.

This time Hugh was especially anxious to get home to tell them all the news about Edward. Edward had tried to persuade him to keep the matter secret.

"After all, because I have spoken at a discussion-class on a few occasions, and you have been pleased to like what I have said, it does not follow that I have any particular gift of speech," he said. "If you make a fuss about me, you will raise the expectations of the people at home, and perhaps I shall only disappoint them, which would make my failure doubly bitter."

But Hugh only laughed at that.

"I shall certainly tell them what you have done, and the effects which your speeches have upon the boys," he said. "As to your disappointing us in the future, after what you have already done, I do not for a moment fear it."

"Well, do not say anything about it now, Hugh. Let us wait until the next holidays, and then we shall know better whether I am really likely ever to accomplish anything."

"I will not wait a day longer," said Hugh. "If I could have had my way I would have written and told them on the very next evening to that on which we had our first discussion."

As soon as the greetings were over Hugh told them.

"Do you know," said he, "that we have a genius in the family?"

"Indeed! Does his name happen to be Hugh Clarence?" inquired Grace.

"Alas, no! Such a distinction will never belong to me."

"It does not matter," said Lettice, by way of encouragement to her favourite brother. "You have read the fable of the hare and the tortoise? Patient plodding is better than spasmodic racing."

"So it is, Lettice," said Edward.

"But our genius is a patient plodder as well as a racer," said Hugh; "so that I do not see how he can fail to reach the goal."

"Pray in what department of science or art does our genius excel?" asked Mr. Clarence.

"In the art of oratory," replied Hugh.

"It must be yourself," said his mother.

"No; it is no other than Edward."

"Edward!" There was a very perceptible

shade of disappointment in the tone with which the name was uttered.

Mr. Clarence laughed. "Of course, Edward is too young for any one to tell much about him at present," said he. "I do not suppose that if he has any genius it will show itself for some time to come. Attend to your lessons, Edward, my boy, and do not be in the least affected by Hugh's foolish words."

Edward could not help feeling rather depressed at the way in which the news was received by those who were very dear to him, and whose opinion was, therefore, of great value. But he said nothing. Hugh, however, felt that part of their incredulity arose from the way in which he had told them, and he resolved to wait for an opportunity when his father and mother were alone with Lettice, and tell them then.

The time soon came, and Hugh convinced them by his earnestness that he was saying only what was perfectly true.

"I am very much surprised; I did not think it was in Edward to be clever," said Mr. Clarence; "and he is so young that I scarcely feel much confidence in him even now."

"You would, father, if you had only heard him speak," said Hugh. "I assure you all the masters are talking about him, and Mr. Davis says he will bring great honour upon the school."

"It has taken us by surprise," said Mrs. Clarence; "but I do not know that we need feel so very much astonished. I have often observed that Edward expressed himself very nicely, and that he was a thoughtful boy."

"We must not raise our hopes too high even

now," said his father. "Clever boys do not always make clever men."

"But I think Edward will fulfil the promise of his youth," said Hugh.

"We will wait and see," said Mr. Clarence.

But that evening the mother of the family called Edward into her room, and put her arms around him and kissed him.

"My boy," she said, "if God has given you any special talent, I hope He will help you to use it alone for His glory. No one will rejoice in your success with such joy as that which your mother will feel, and even if you fail I shall not love you the less. I hope you will persevere in what you have begun, and that time may prove that you are worthy to be listened to as a speaker. But never forget, Edward, that it is better to be good than to be clever."

It was nearly dark, so no one, not even his mother, saw the tears in Edward's eyes. He laid his head upon her shoulder, and there silently asked God to prosper him, and make him a good and useful man. He felt very happy, for he understood how much his mother loved him, and he felt very strong, for even the doubts of his family helped to make him resolute; and so, again on that night, he determined to do the very best he could with his life.

Strange to say, he found it far more difficult to speak, even to his mother, of the hopes and ambitions which were in his heart than he had found it to discuss questions of merely public interest before a crowd of his schoolfellows. So he could but say two or three words in a very faltering tone.

"Dear mother," he said, "I do not expect any of you to believe in me yet, but I mean to be an orator if it is possible."

"I believe in you, Edward," said his mother, quietly.

"Then I can wait for the confidence of all besides," said Edward gratefully.

But more than his mother believed in him.

While she and Edward were talking together, Hugh, Frank, and Grace were in Lettice's room talking too.

"It is quite true what Hugh says," declared Frank. "I was never so much surprised in my life as when Edward, looking ridiculously young and small, made his first speech about war. But the wonder has not ceased, for he is better each time we hear him, and the boys all listen to him as if he were already some great man. They say it is marvellous, and I think so too."

"I should like to hear him," said Lettice. "I wonder if I ever shall?"

"Of course you will, Lettice. We shall have him lecturing or something in the neighbourhood before he is as old as I."

"And if not, you will hear him at some other place."

"He works very hard at his studies," said Hugh. "He is first in his class for almost every subject, and I should not wonder if he is removed into a higher section when we return."

"I am glad he does not neglect his lessons," said Grace.

"But he must not work too hard, or he will make himself ill," said Lettice.

"That is all I am afraid of," said Hugh; "but

I think he is pretty careful, and I shall look after him well. I tell him that he will never have the power to become famous unless he is physically strong."

"I have been thinking," said Lettice, "that he ought to go to college."

"And so have I," said Hugh. "It would do him so much good to have a college education; indeed, I think he ought to have one, but I do not see that it is possible."

"Why is it not possible?" inquired Frank.

"Because I am sure father cannot afford it."

"Could not we help in some way?" said Grace.

"I think we might," said Lettice. "Of course he will not be ready for college for some years, and in the meantime we might get some money, either by earning or saving, that would be sufficient."

"We do not get much pocket money," said Frank; "but I would gladly spare some toward so good an object."

"And so would I," said Hugh. "I think we should all help our brother, as he has some sense in him. As for me, I expect I am fit for nothing but a business man. If I leave school a year earlier than I intended I shall be earning money before Edward will have passed through all the grades of our school; so I shall be able to render him some very considerable assistance."

"But we must not trust alone to that," said Lettice; "because you might not be able to spare any just at first. I propose we each have a money-box, and that we shall put into it all that we can spare for the next two or three years."

"We shall get a good sum in that time," said Grace.

"And do not let us say anything about it to Edward; but let it be a joyful surprise just at the time when he most wants it."

"Yes, that would be capital."

So it was agreed: and the next day Hugh and Grace went out shopping, and bought four money-boxes.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### FRANK.

THE money-boxes were a great success, so far as concerned some of the members of Mr. Clarence's family. Those who were self-denying, and thought more of Edward's progress and welfare than of their own gratification, contributed the most money, and found their boxes getting the most heavy. No one gave so much as Lettice. "Poor Lettice," as every one called her now, was obliged to lie upon the couch, and looked as if she could do nothing to help any one. And yet not one of the family did so much for the others. Lettice was always ready to do her utmost, and she was a living illustration of the truth of the old proverb, "Where there's a will there's a way." Lettice had the will, and she often found a way.

One morning a lady called to see her.

"Miss Clarence," she said, "I have heard of your skill and industry in making up clothes for the poor. There is a family which I am anxious to supply with tidy, suitable clothing. Could you sell me a few articles?"

"I would rather give them to you," said Lettice.

"Oh, no, I should not like to have them unless you will allow me to pay for them. I assure you I shall be only too glad to have them at a reasonable price."

Lettice thought about it for a moment or two.

"There is no disgrace in earning money," she thought, "and it will be honestly earned. Every shilling will help Edward, so I will take the offer."

"Thank you," she said to the lady. "I will sell you anything you please."

For the next few weeks she was very busy, but she was not sorry to be fully occupied, especially for her brother. Every penny which she received for the articles went into the box, and it was quite surprising how the sum increased. Other persons, besides the lady already mentioned, asked her to do work for them, and so, little by little, the money for Edward's college expenses was increasing.

Grace could not do much towards it, but she did what she could. She was very clever at drawing. Her pictures were executed with great taste, and were always much admired. While she was at school, of course her pocket money was not too much for her own personal requirements. But she spent as little as possible, and tried to get more by selling her pictures. She had as little time as money; but by rising early in the morning, and making the best use of the bright daylight,

she was able to accomplish much more than she had ever hoped.

Hugh manfully did his best. It was indeed a good thing for him that he had this motive for steadiness and economy. His time at school was growing short; his father already needed his services, and he intended to begin his career in life without loss of time. So he studied with all his might; but he spent very little upon himself, putting nearly all the money which his father allowed him into the box.

The only person who did nothing was Frank. At first he intended doing his part, and he dropped a shilling in the money-box which had been provided for him. But he soon felt sorry that he had done so, and wanted the money back. Not only so, but he contrived to get it out of the box. Frank was living in such a way as would certainly some time or other cause great grief to his parents, and brothers, and sisters, and great trouble to himself. For, though for a time it may seem pleasant to do wrong, the Bible words are true, "The way of transgressors is hard." Frank would be sure to find it so in the end, although he seldom thought of it now. He was very unfortunate in his choice of companions. He chose the worst boys in the school as his friends. And any boy may be known by the company he keeps. It was a pity that he did not follow the good example which, at this time, both his brothers were setting. Hugh and Edward were diligently pursuing their studies, each trying to do his duty, and fit himself for his future career. But Frank selfishly thought of none but himself, and seemed only to care to indulge his own tastes. He and some other boys

helped each other in the bad courses which they had chosen. For some time, as each kept his own secrets, their acts were not generally known; but after awhile the masters became aware that Frank Clarence was not all that he should be.

The first thing that brought him into trouble with his teachers was the bad and foolish habit of smoking. Of course it was not allowed in the school. On a certain half-holiday Mr. Davis was walking in the fields, when he suddenly came upon a group of boys too busily talking to observe his approach. They were laughing boisterously, and playing tricks upon each other, and Frank Clarence was smoking.

Mr. Davis went to him at once, to the surprise and consternation of the boys.

"Frank, do you not know that smoking is forbidden by the rules of the school?"

For a moment Frank looked confused; but seeing that the eyes of the other boys were upon him, he endeavoured to appear perfectly at ease.

"I am not in the school now, sir," he said.

"Certainly not; but you are still one of the scholars, and the rules bind you whether you are off or on the premises. Give me that cigar."

"It is mine, sir."

"Give it to me."

Frank wished he had the courage to disobey, but he had not. He gave up the cigar, and saw it flung over the hedge.

"Now, Frank, you will return at once with me."

"But it is a holiday."

"Why do you speak so? You know that you have forfeited your right to the holiday. Come at once."

With a comical look at the other boys, Frank accompanied the master.

"I am sorry to see you so inclined to do what is wrong, Frank," said Mr. Davis. "Your brothers and friends will be greatly disappointed in you if you do not at once make up your mind to do better."

"We cannot all be saints, like Ned."

"You cannot all be as clever as Edward, perhaps; but you can be as persevering and conscientious. Why do you not try, Frank? You have lately been behind with your lessons, and if you are not careful you will fail at the coming examinations. If I were you I would turn to better pursuits than those which now engage your leisure time. Smoking, for instance, is a pernicious habit. You must give it up. I wish, too, that you would choose other companions. You are making those boys worse, and they are doing you harm, too. Why not join the lads who belong to the discussion class?"

"I am no speaker, sir."

"But you might be that, or something equally good. It will be a pity if you waste the best days of your life, or squander your boyhood in doing more harm than good."

"I do not want to grow old and sober before my time. I mean to have all the pleasure I can get."

"By all means. But let it be real pleasure. There is no happiness in sin, Frank. If I were you I would consider the matter thoughtfully. I hope you will make up your mind to be good, and do your duty."

Frank did not reply, and Mr. Davis sent him

to his room. But the boy was so foolish and resolute in choosing his own way, that even on that evening he contrived to have a drinking party of his friends.

Mr. Davis saw that Frank was not inclined to give up his bad habits, and he resolved to watch him more closely.

Only a shorttime after, a boy lost half-a-crown, and complained to Mr. Davis.

"I left it on the table in my bedroom," said the boy, "so I am sure that some one has taken it. It could not go without hands."

"How long had it lain there when you missed it?"

"Only about half-an-hour, sir."

"If any boy has taken it, let him return it. 'I cannot believe that we have a thief in the school; I suppose one of you took it for a joke. But such jokes would be better not played in future. Now, will the boy who has taken it return it in an honest manner?'"

There was a great silence which no one broke. Mr. Davis looked at the boys' faces, but he did not wish to judge any.

"I can scarcely think that either of you has it," he said, "or of course you would return it. Remember all of you, that 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.' And remember, too, those other solemn words, 'Be sure your sin will find you out.' I have no more to say to you now."

About a fortnight later, Frank was in trouble. A schoolfellow who had lent him some money wanted it back very particularly.

"In fact, I must have it, Frank," he said;

"you promised to pay me a month ago, and I cannot wait any longer. If you do not let me have it before to-morrow evening, I will ask you for it in the presence of all the boys, and let them know what a mean fellow you are."

Frank could not bear the thought of that. He wished the boys to think him generous and kind. But he was quite sure that his creditor would keep his threat. So he waited until all the boys were busy, and then he did a thing of which he might well be ashamed. He crept upstairs, and went into all the bedrooms, silently opening and closing the drawers and boxes.

An hour afterwards, Mr. Davis, with a most stern look upon his face, called Frank into his room, and ordered him to take out the contents of his pockets.

Frank turned red, and then white, as, among other things, he laid upon the table three half-crowns.

"Where did you get these?" said Mr. Davis, pointing to them.

"They were sent to me from home," said Frank.

"How can you say so, Frank? You got them from a table in number five bedroom. If you examine them you will find that on each one of them a small D has been scratched."

Frank felt very frightened at his sin, and especially as the danger he had incurred came into his mind, and he fell upon his knees and begged Mr. Davis to forgive him.

Mr. Davis sent for Hugh and told him about it. Poor Hugh was in great distress.

"Oh, Frank, how could you do it?" he

said. "It will break the hearts of Lettice and mother."

He united his entreaties for forgiveness with Frank's.

"Do not expel him from the school, sir. Please give him another chance. I think he will redeem his character, and prove that he only became a thief under sudden and irresistible temptation."

"No temptation is irresistible," said Mr. Davis. "If Frank had chosen to be honest, nothing would have made him a thief."

But in the end, Mr. Davis promised that he would not *this time* insist upon his leaving school.

"For the sake of your brothers I will try you again," he said; "but in future you will have to be very careful, for I will not again pass over such a sin."

Hugh talked to his brother with tears. Mr. Davis also kindly and gravely pointed out how great the fault had been. Frank seemed exceedingly sorry for what he had done; and when Hugh had helped him with some money, he resolved that he would in future be honest. But he did not give up his evil companions.

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## CHAPTER X.

## DID HE DO, IT ?

THE boys of the school were known wherever they went by the caps which they wore. The green tassels were badges which showed who they were. These were good things on the whole, for most of the boys behaved well, and strove to keep up the honour of the school ; but some of them were not as particular in their conduct as the rest, and it seemed as if nothing could make them so.

One day a number of these latter were at play near a railroad. They were trying to jump across the rails ; and, as several good jumpers were among them, they accomplished some rather surprising feats. Boys rather like danger, and are often foolishly reckless, as these are now.

"A train is coming !" shouted one, presently.

"Let us jump over and back again before it comes up," said another.

Immediately they prepared to do so, and the boys who were the least quick only just got out of the way in time.

Very soon after one of the porters came up.

"You boys must not play here," he said.

"There are plenty of other places where you may go ; so I do not know why you should choose this place above all others. Move on !"

"We shall not move on," said Frank Clarence.

"Who are you, that we should take any notice of what you say ?"

"You can see that I belong to the railway company, and I will not allow you to play here," said the man.

"We shall play here as long as we please," said Frank ; and immediately he again sprang over the lines.

"If you do not go I will make you !" said the porter.

And as he spoke he took up a stick, and advanced threateningly to Frank. Frank, however, thought the man would not strike him, so he did not run away. He was mistaken. The next moment he felt a couple of smart blows across the shoulders, which hurt as well as surprised him.

"How dare you do that ?" cried Frank. "I will make you repent it before you are much older, you impudent fellow !"

"Will you walk away from the line ?" said the man, "or shall I give you a little more of the stick first ?"

He looked as if he were quite ready, so Frank and his companions unwillingly walked away, Frank again muttering that he would make the man suffer for his interference.

That evening something happened which filled all who lived in the neighbourhood with great alarm. It was a railway accident. A train was passing along at full speed, when suddenly the driver became aware that the line was blocked up. It was too late for him to do anything, and he kept at his post, waiting with horror to see what would happen. The train was thrown off the line,

and soon came to a standstill ; but not before all the passengers had been severely shaken, and some of them seriously hurt. The accident happened on the very spot where the boys had been at play.

Of course great consternation was felt. It seemed miraculous that so many had escaped, and comparatively so little harm had been done. But the mischief was great enough to have caused suffering to many persons, and great indignation was felt against the individuals who had been the occasion of it.

For it was soon ascertained that a number of stones had been fetched from a short distance and placed on the line, and that these stones had obstructed the passage of the train.

Such tidings soon spread. They reached the school, where the boys gathered in excited groups to talk over the occurrence.

"If any evil-disposed person has deliberately done it in order to injure the lives of others, no punishment is too bad for him," said one boy.

"He deserves to be well whipped," said another.

"Whipped, indeed !" cried a third ; "that would be a very slight punishment. He ought to be hung."

"As he probably will be," said Edward Clarence. "It is very likely that some one of the passengers will die, and then I should think the jury would bring in a verdict of murder against the person who caused the death."

"It would only be manslaughter," said one.

"It would be more than that, for of course the mischief must have been wilfully done."

The boys were still talking, when their excitement was greatly increased by seeing two policemen come up the garden path. They all hastened towards them ; but the policemen merely looked at them quietly, and then asked for the master. One of them went in to speak to him, and the other remained outside, apparently keeping watch over the boys. In a few minutes Mr. Davis came out, looking exceedingly sorrowful and pale.

"Is Frank Clarence here ?" he said. "Some of you tell him that I want to speak to him."

Hugh began to tremble at once. "Oh, sir, has he been doing wrong again ?" he said, piteously.

Mr. Davis laid his hand kindly on Hugh's shoulder. "My poor boy," he said, "I cannot think he is guilty of the terrible crime of which he is accused ; and if he be innocent all will be well. Where is he ?"

"I don't know where he is, sir. He was here not a minute since."

The troubled look upon Mr. Davis's face deepened. "We must find him. Go to his room, Hugh, and bring him to me at once."

But before Hugh returned, Frank was in the office with Mr. Davis and the policeman. His colour changed as soon as he saw the latter, and he turned to Mr. Davis.

"What does this mean ?"

"It means," said the officer, speaking instead of the master, "that I arrest you on suspicion of having caused the accident to the train."

"I ? What do you mean ? I had nothing to do with it," said Frank, in an indignant tone.

The policeman warned him that anything he said might be used against him at his trial.

"You don't think I did this, sir, do you?" asked Frank of Mr. Davis.

"I hope you did not, Frank. I should think you did not commit so wicked an act; but of course you are the only person who really knows, unless you had any accomplices."

Frank looked at Hugh, who was weeping bitterly.

"Hugh," he said, "indeed, indeed, I know nothing about this. I did not do it, I assure you. Will you not believe me?"

Hugh looked into his brother's face.

"Yes, Frank, I believe you. I feel sure you did not do it."

"I am so glad you trust me, Hugh. I have told you the truth. You will have to tell them at home all about it, but be sure to say that I am innocent of the cruel charge brought against me."

"I will," said Hugh. "We know you are not guilty."

Hugh used the pronoun "We," but Frank felt that his brother was the only person who believed his assertion. And he was right. Mr. Davis, remembering Frank's former faults, was afraid he was not innocent.

"If he could rob his schoolfellows, I fear he could do anything," he thought.

"Are you ready?" said the policeman.

"Ready for what?"

"To come with me."

"You are not going to lock me up when I am not guilty."

"Of course if you are innocent that can be proved before the magistrates to-morrow; but you must come with me now."

"I will not," said Frank, trying to break away. But he soon found that to be impossible. The policemen were quite prepared to use force if necessary.

"You had better go quietly, Frank," said Mr. Davis, very gravely. "No possible good will come of your resistance. Whether you have done this dreadful thing or not will have to be tried now, and your opposition will only make it the more painful for us all."

"Very well, sir. Good-bye, Hugh."

The two brothers grasped each other's hands; and then Frank and the two policemen departed in a cab which was waiting at the gate.

Hugh felt as if he could not see the boys again.

"Of course I must go home and tell my father about it," said Hugh to Mr. Davis. "I would gladly keep it from him if I could, but it will be in the papers to-morrow morning. Besides, something must be done at once towards liberating Frank. We cannot allow him to lie in prison suspected of such a horrible crime."

"You will be just in time for the next train if you leave at once, Hugh," said Mr. Davis. "I wish I could save you from this trouble, my boy."

"Thank you, sir. It will be a trouble to you too, for the whole school will be disgraced."

"Yes, of course, I feel that. But we will not talk of it now. Will you take Edward with you?"

"Oh, yes! I could not leave him here alone to bear the remarks of the boys."

Half-an-hour later Hugh and Edward were in the train on their way home. "Did he do it?" was the question which was uppermost in his

mind. Once he uttered it aloud, and Hugh replied indignantly, "No, he did not."

But somehow Edward could not feel so sure about it.

Great was the surprise of Mr. and Mrs. Clarence when the two boys arrived.

"How is this?" inquired their father.

"Is anything the matter with Frank?" demanded the mother, noticing his absence.

Happily for them all, Lettice had retired for the night.

"Something is the matter, father," said Hugh; "but it can easily be made right. A railway accident has been caused by some mischievous persons having placed some stones upon the railway."

"Well, what has that to do with Frank?"

"Frank is accused of doing it."

Both parents stared in utter astonishment.

"Frank accused!"

"Yes. I think it comes about because Frank and some of the other boys were playing near the spot a short time before; but it is absurd to think he did it."

"Where is he?"

Hugh hesitated; and his mother gave a cry of terror that startled them all.

"Hugh, Frank is not in custody, is he?"

"Yes he is, mother darling; but it will only be for to-night. Everything will be explained to-morrow."

"Yes, we will hope so," said Mr. Clarence. "This is a great and unexpected sorrow, but we must not be overwhelmed by it. I must think at once what is best to be done, for there is no time

to be lost. Let us pray to God, and He will help and guide us."

"But I cannot bear to think of my boy in prison," said the mother.

"God is with him there, mother," said Edward.

Mrs. Clarence knew that, and it comforted her to think of it; but it was a very, very sad night that was spent in Frank's home after that memorable day.

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## CHAPTER XI.

### GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY?

THE night that followed Frank's arrest was a very anxious one for all who cared for him. Mr. Clarence had no rest. He spent a few hours in considering what was best to be done; and then he left his home, and went through the darkness to the town where Frank was.

"May I go with you, father?" asked Hugh.

"Had you not better stay and comfort your mother and sister?" said his father.

"I will stay with them if you wish me to do so, father," said Hugh; "but perhaps I may be able to help you in some way if you will let me go with you."

Mrs. Clarence said a word or two to decide the question.

"Take Hugh; he is the oldest son; he ought to do his part in this trouble. Edward will stay with us."

So Hugh went. But it was a very sad journey. Father and son did not exchange many words during the first part of it. But as they drew towards the end, Hugh said, "Shall you consult a lawyer, father?"

"I shall go to the school first and see Mr. Davis. If he thinks it necessary, I shall go at once to any lawyer whom he can recommend. I am sorry for every reason that this has happened. There is not only the disgrace of it, but the expense will be great too, and I do not know how to afford it."

Hugh was silent a minute or two.

"Father," he said, presently, "I think the money which we have saved for Edward should go toward the expense of getting Frank out of this trouble."

"I do not know. It seems a great pity not to leave it for the purpose for which it was originally intended."

"But Edward would be the first to wish us to use it for Frank."

"Perhaps he would. We shall see," said Mr. Clarence, with a sigh.

"We have resolved as a family we will help one another, you know, father," said Hugh, pleasantly.

"Hugh," said Mr. Clarence, seriously, "it often happens that in a large family there is one or more who is a continual trouble to the others. You have made up your minds to help Edward. What if you should be compelled to look after

Frank, and forgive him, and help him in consequence of his own wrong-doing?"

Hugh was silent for a moment.

Then he said, "We would do the best we could for our brother."

"That is right, my son. You would not forsake him, although he should seem to be even a disgrace to you all."

A lump came into Hugh's throat. His father had put into words the fear that had lately frequently floated across his mind.

"We would not give him up, father. I am sure that all of us would try to persuade him to be better."

"This is an eventful night, Hugh. Do not forget what you have just said. I take it as a promise to me."

There was almost a solemn tone in Mr. Clarence's voice as he said this, which struck Hugh.

"I will never, never forget it, father," said the boy, in a low voice.

And he never did.

Hugh did not like to ask his father what made him speak so of Frank. He thought he did not know that he was not all that he ought to be. Hugh and Edward had never told tales of their brother. But Mr. Clarence had suspected that all was not right. The tone of Frank's letters was not at all satisfactory; and indeed for some time he had never written to those at home, excepting to ask for money.

"You are sure in your own mind that Frank did not do this wicked thing of which he is accused?" said Mr. Clarence, as in the early morning light

they stood at the school, waiting for admission.

"Quite sure. I have not a doubt, father."

Mr. Clarence found that others did not share in Hugh's belief. Mr. Davis was up, and indeed he looked as if he had not slept at all, when Mr. Clarence and Hugh sought him.

"I cannot tell you how grieved I am that you should have this trouble, Mr. Clarence," he said.

"Thank you. I was sure of your sympathy before I came. I shall be glad of your advice and help too. Do you think that this charge will be in all seriousness brought against my boy?"

"Oh yes; it certainly will."

"Then it will be necessary to obtain legal assistance."

"Certainly."

"Do you know a gentleman whom I could trust, and who would be likely to take up the case?"

"Yes; and I will go with you to his office at once if you please."

"There will be no difficulty, I should think? His innocence will at once be proved?"

"I hope so."

It seemed to Mr. Clarence that even these words expressed a doubt, and it pained him exceedingly.

"I am afraid Frank has not given you entire satisfaction lately, Mr. Davis," he said.

"I confess that such is the case," said Mr. Davis, with hesitation. "Still I hope for the best; perhaps this trouble may have a good effect upon him in making him more serious. There

must surely be much that is good in him, and his brothers set him an excellent example."

"I am glad to hear that."

"There is a decided change for the better in Hugh, and indeed his conduct has been quite irreproachable lately. As for Edward, I consider that he is a lad of great promise. I trust he will give you constant pleasure and satisfaction."

"I wish the same could be said of Frank."

"We must have patience. All may yet be well. At least we will hope for the best."

Mr. Clarence sighed. If boys really knew and understood what grief their ill-conduct causes those who love them best, would they not be more frequently careful, and strive more earnestly to be good?

Mr. Clarence secured the services of an able solicitor, and everything was done that could be on Frank's behalf.

Mr. Clarence saw his boy at the police-station.

"Oh, father, I am glad you have come," said Frank, looking very white and frightened. "They will surely not punish me for what I never did, will they? Indeed, indeed, I did not put the stones upon the line; I never even thought of such a thing, and it is a shame to be accused of it."

And Frank began to cry aloud.

"Hush, Frank. You must control yourself. Try to be brave and calm now. No doubt your innocence will be proved."

"But, papa, it will kill me to go to prison."

"No, Frank; people are not killed so easily."

"Cannot it be managed without my going before the magistrates?"

"No, Frank; you must certainly pass through that ordeal."

"But after it is over I shall be released, and return home with you?"

"I cannot say that, Frank. It is difficult to get evidence of your innocence. When you left the railway where you had been playing, where did you go?"

Frank blushed, and held his head low. He did not dare to meet his father's eyes.

"It is as I feared," said Mr. Clarence. "You are ashamed to tell me where the remaining part of your holiday was spent. But I must know, Frank, since the assurance of your having been in some other place will be the greatest proof that you are not guilty."

Frank hesitated still.

"Is there no other way, father?" he asked, presently.

"None that I can see," said his father, sternly.

"If you were not ashamed to go to the place, Frank, you need not be ashamed to confess it."

"I was at a—a public-house just outside of the town."

Mr. Clarence groaned. "Tell me the name of it, Frank."

Frank told his father, and Mr. Clarence left.

"I will do the best I can for you, Frank; but I am grieved to the heart to learn what I have learnt about you."

Did Frank feel sorry to have caused his father pain?

At present he was so occupied with longing for

his deliverance, and concern for his own safety, that he thought of very little besides.

He waited with great dread for his examination before the magistrates.

When the time came, and he was taken into court, he nearly fainted. Everybody looked stern and pitiless. Excepting his father and Hugh, he felt as if he had not a friend present. The railway porter told his story, and it was evident that he believed in his guilt. Several other persons spoke to having seen him and other boys playing on the line a short time before the accident.

Frank was full of one thought. "The boys who went with me to the Dragon are sure to come and say that we went straight there as soon as we left the railroad."

They did not do anything of the kind. It is not such boys who prove themselves real friends when the time of trouble comes. They were all quiet. They said not a word, lest their master should punish them for being where they were. Frank was surprised and disappointed. But he had no scruples about mentioning their names. It was at once seen that the affair could not be settled on that day.

Mr. Clarence offered bail, but the magistrates thought the case was so serious that Frank was again locked up, and not allowed to have his liberty. He felt that very much, and was taken from the court crying and complaining loudly. Many of the spectators laughed, and very few pitied him.

"The boy is a coward," they said, and perhaps their judgment was not wrong.

The few days that next followed were, of course, very uncomfortable ones to Frank, but they were days of intense anxiety and unwearying activity to his friends. Frank felt as if they would never pass; Frank's father earnestly desired that they should not pass until the evidence had been collected.

"I hope they will not commit him for trial at the assizes," said Hugh, "for that delay would be intolerable."

"They will do so unless his innocence is most fully established," said his father.

Plenty remained to be done, but it was done within the time. On the morning when he was to be re-examined, Frank looked very different from the rollicking, careless boy he usually appeared. He had thought some very serious thoughts, and had made certain resolutions to the effect that if he were discharged without further delay he would redeem his character, and live a better and nobler life in the future. He had spent a good deal of his time in prayer too, and though his prayers were very selfish ones, they were certainly better than none. So that when he came into the court, although he looked pale, he was more quiet and dignified than on the last occasion.

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## CHAPTER XII.

"IT IS ALL OVER."

WHEN Frank glanced at his father, he saw that there was a look of great relief upon his face, and this gave Frank encouragement and hope. It was stated that all the sufferers from the accident were progressing favourably, and that the worst consequences were not likely to follow. Mr. Clarence, and many others, felt profound thankfulness on that account. A great many more persons were present than during the first examination, and Frank was not left long in doubt as to whether there would be proof of his having been at the Dragon when it was said he was committing a most wicked act upon the railroad. The boys who had been with him came into the room, accompanied by Mr. Davis, and very unfriendly were the glances which they cast towards Frank. Indeed, they had decided among themselves that he deserved to be well punished for getting them into trouble, and that if ever they had the opportunity they would see that he had what he deserved. Their evidence, however, was of some importance, for they told the truth when the proper time came, and as there was no discrepancy in their statements, they were believed. It is possible, however, that even this would not have been enough to procure Frank's release, but that evidence of another kind was forthcoming. A young man, an idiot, known

by all the inhabitants of the town as mischievous, confessed that he had placed the stones on the line, because he knew that a lad who had teased him was in the train. The lad mentioned declared that he had threatened to do it, but that he had not supposed the threat to be sincere. Two persons gave evidence to the effect that they had seen "Foolish Willy," as he was called, gathering stones and taking them towards the railway.

The magistrates therefore at once gave orders that Frank should be discharged ; but before he left one of the gentlemen spoke very seriously to him, advising him not again, by his own words or conduct, to subject himself to suspicion.

"Keep in good company, and turn your attention to good things, Frank," said Mr. Davis, as the lad stepped up to the group of friends who were awaiting him.

"I will, sir," said Frank, as with a glad smile he shook hands with them all.

As he passed into the street with his father the boys who had been present, and who were his former companions, slightly hissed him, which brought a flush of vexation to his face. Hugh stepped quickly to his side.

"Never mind, Frank. Let them go. They were never the right friends for you. Seek others who are better in the future."

But Frank could not help feeling it keenly.

"It was not wrong to tell about them," said he. "It was necessary for my own safety. But I suppose they will make school disagreeable for me."

"If you ever go back."

"*If?*" What is to hinder me."

"Perhaps the masters will rather not have you back after what has happened."

"But it is all over now, and I am proved not guilty. It ought to be forgotten."

Mr. Davis was speaking to Mr. Clarence.

"You will come in and partake of some refreshment before you leave?"

"Thank you. I prefer to leave at once."

"Are we going home, father?" inquired Frank.

"Yes; your mother is very anxious about you, Frank."

The journey was passed over very quietly. No one was disposed to talk. The strain of excitement upon each of them had been great, and they were all tired out.

Mr. Clarence, as he looked at his second son, resolved that he would take an opportunity of speaking earnestly to him, but he felt that this was not the time. Hugh could scarcely have suffered more than he had done if he had stood in his brother's place, and he could not, all at once, rise from the pressure which had been put upon him. As for Frank, he was so light-hearted after his escape, that he whistled and sang as the train bore him homeward.

Eager, anxious faces met them as they entered. Edward stepped forward, and was the first to greet his brother.

"Is it all over, Frank?"

"Yes, and it is all right, of course."

"I am so glad. Come in quickly, for mother is waiting."

Mrs. Clarence came to the door, and silently folded Frank in her arms, and held him for some

seconds to her bosom, while tears gathered in her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

At last she said, "Thank God! thank God! Oh! my boy, what sorrow we have all had."

"But it is over now, mother. It was a great shame for them to suspect me."

Lettice was lying on the sofa, but before Mrs. Clarence had released Frank she beckoned him. He went towards her as soon as his mother's arms were withdrawn. She drew him gently down to her, and kissed him fondly, and then taking his face in her two hands, she looked long and steadily into his eyes. Frank did not quite like it. The colour came into his cheeks, and he let the lids drop over his eyes.

"Frank, look at me," said Lettice.

"But you stare so, Lettice. Why do you? The trouble is all over now, you know. Let us forget it as soon as possible."

"No, Frank dear, it will be well that you should not forget it too soon."

"That is nonsense," said Frank, uneasily. "No good can come of our being miserable over what has been a mistake."

He looked up from Lettice at all the earnest faces that were gravely watching him.

"You could not look at me more reproachfully if I had been guilty of that of which I was falsely accused," said he, bitterly.

"Do not think so, Frankie dear," said Lettice gently. "But we cannot help feeling anxious about you, because we love you."

"Edward has been talking to you of me," said Frank.

"No, that is how it is," said Lettice. "It is

Edward's resolute refusal to talk about you which has made us feel that there is not much good to tell."

For a moment Frank was quiet. Then he said, with petulant impatience, "I do not pretend to have been perfect. Indeed I have done many things that I am sorry for now, but that, too, is all over. I intend to turn over a new leaf, and work hard at my studies, and keep out of bad company, and improve myself in all possible ways."

And, having said so much, Frank thought they ought all to be perfectly content. He trusted himself so much that he was annoyed when he found that other people had not the same confidence in his promises of amendment.

"I feel sure that you mean what you say," said his mother, "and if there is really a change for the better we shall none of us mind this trouble."

"And now let us be happy and cheerful, and talk of something else," said Frank.

Lettice smiled, but it was rather a sad smile. It was so like Frank to wish to forget any subject that was serious. She would like to have seen him care less about being pleased.

"I feel quite slighted and neglected."

At the sound of that voice Frank looked up.

"Grace, I did not see you before."

"No one has seen me, not even papa. I expected a scolding from him long before this."

"You deserve one," said Mr. Clarence, kissing her, smilingly.

"Why did you come, Grace?"

"I heard what had happened, papa, and I could not stay away. I felt that we should be all

together in the trouble. Are not you glad to see me ?”

“I am glad to see you, my child ; but it was not necessary, and, of course, it will increase the expense.”

“No, father dear, I came to offer you my assistance in meeting the expenses of this false accusation.”

Mr. Clarence laughed, and all the others looked amused.

“What sort of assistance, Grace ?”

“Pecuniary assistance, papa.”

“Have you brought it with you ?”

“Yes.”

“What is it ?—twopence, sixpence, or a shilling ?”

Grace took from her pocket a purse, opened it, and took from it five sovereigns, which she laid upon the table.

The amused look upon the faces around changed to one of great surprise.

“What does it mean, Gracie ?” inquired Hugh.

“It means that I give five pounds to father as a contribution towards paying the expenses of this troublesome affair.”

“But where did you get the money, Grace ?”

“Ah ! that’s my secret.”

“You must not keep a secret from us.”

“No. But I should like to keep this little one all to myself.”

“No, no ; tell us,” said a chorus of voices.

“Must I tell, mamma ?”

“Yes, I think so, Grace.”

“Then the money is my own, for I honestly earned it.”

"How, Grace? Tell us what you mean."

"Well, then, for more than a year I have been at odd times working at a picture, which is now finished. Before it was quite completed, a lady who was visiting the school saw it, and admired it, and offered to buy it."

"And you sold it to her for five pounds?"

"Yes, that was the sum she offered me. Of course I did not know what it was worth."

"Was it pretty, Grace? Describe it to us."

"I have brought it that you may judge for yourselves."

"Oh, that is capital! Fetch it! Let us look at it at once."

"Had we not better be patient? I am hungry, and no doubt mother has made preparations for a treat for us."

"The picture first. Let us see the picture!"

"Very well. Hugh must help me fetch it."

"Is it so large that one cannot carry it?"

It was not very large, but it was very beautiful. At least so thought the artist's parents, and brothers and sisters. It was simple, too: a child and a Newfoundland dog resting together under a very old hawthorn tree in full blossom.

"It is worth five pounds, I am sure," said Hugh.

"But I am sorry that the money which has been so well earned should be taken for such a purpose," said Frank.

"Oh! never mind," said Grace cheerfully. "It was intended for some one else," and here an intelligent look passed between her and Hugh and Lettice, "but of course it is only right that

whoever needs it first should have it. Is not that right, Lettice ?”

“Quite right, Gracie.”

“And no doubt Frank will try to repay you the money,” said their mother.

“Yes ; I will not forget I owe you the debt, Grace,” said Frank.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### AN UNPOPULAR BOY.

THE boys had been at home nearly a week, when Mr. Clarence expressed his wish that they should return to school.

“I am ready,” said Edward. “I have been wishing to go every day.”

“There is no hurry,” said Frank. “I think we deserve a little holiday after all that has happened.”

“You have had a little holiday, Frank,” said his father. “I think you should go back to school at once and make up for lost time.”

“Very well, father. When shall we go ?”

“On Monday.”

So it seemed settled. But then Hugh spoke.

“Father, there is something which I wish to say to you.”

“Say it, Hugh. It is no secret, is it ?”

"No, father. I want you to let me leave school now. As I am at home I need not return. I feel sure that I could help you in the business, and I should be so glad to try. Is there not something that I could do?"

"I think, perhaps, you had better wait a year longer; and yet," said Mr. Clarence, wearily, "I find it almost more than I can do, and perhaps you could relieve me."

"It is my right, you know, father: and it would not hurt me in any way. Many boys younger than I have left school; and, besides, I shall be able to continue some of my studies at home. What do you think about it, mother?"

"I think, my boy, that it will be well for you to help your father, for the work and anxiety are evidently too much for him."

"I think so too," said Lettice. "Hugh is young and strong, and does not mind taking his share of the family burdens. Father will have more leisure to take care of himself when Hugh understands the business."

So it was settled. Frank and Edward were to go back to school, and Hugh was at once to commence assisting his father.

"I wish I were you," said Frank to him.

"Why?"

"Because I should be so glad not to go back and have to see all the boys."

"You need not mind, Frank. You have not committed the act with which you were charged. Why should you fear?"

"I don't fear, exactly; but it is not pleasant to have a number of fellows turn their backs upon you."

"It will not really hurt you. I hope you will be courageous, and stick to the right, whatever they may do or say."

"Oh, yes, of course. But don't preach, Hugh," said Frank, with some impatience.

Hugh sighed. He did not want to preach, but he was anxious about his brother, and he longed to say a word or two which might help to make him strong to resist temptation. There was no other opportunity, however, and on Monday morning Frank and Edward presented themselves before Mr. Davis.

"I am glad to see you again, Edward. I hope you will have no difficulty in overtaking the other boys. It was well to return so soon, as I should have been sorry for you to lose the place which you have gained in the class."

"Thank you, sir; I hope I shall be able to retain it."

"Hugh is not to return? We shall miss him in the school. His behaviour has been quite unexceptionable of late, and he has deservedly won a good reputation. I trust he will become a successful man in business."

"I think he will be a great help and comfort to father," said Edward.

Mr. Davis then looked steadily at Frank, but he spoke kindly too.

"I wish to speak rather seriously to you, my boy. Since you have been at home many things have come to my knowledge respecting your conduct of which I was not at all aware, and at which I am exceedingly grieved."

"I hope you will let bygones be bygones, sir. I assure you that I intend to do better for the future."

"I hope you do, Frank. It is of the utmost importance that you should thoughtfully consider your past actions, and if you do, you will be convinced that they were of a kind which brought great discredit upon yourself, and injured others also. I trust you have really resolved to be very different in future."

"I have, indeed, sir."

"But even good resolutions are not enough in themselves, unless you are very determined to carry them out. You will find that it requires great firmness and patience, but I will not discourage you. Only, Frank, remember that I shall watch you closely, and if I see any return to the old ways be sure that you will be severely dealt with."

"What a shame!" said Frank to his brother, when they had left Mr. Davis; "nobody seems to trust me."

"But everybody will trust you if you prove yourself worthy of trust," said Edward, gently.

Frank did not reply.

"The boys are in this room, as we can tell by the sound of their voices," said Frank, opening the door.

Fifty or sixty eyes were raised to meet the new comers, and then a strange and ominous silence fell upon the room. It was not school time, and there was not a teacher present, or perhaps the boys would have behaved differently. After a moment or two, several came towards Edward eagerly.

"I am glad you are back. Come along, we are getting to-morrow's lessons ready," said one boy, waiting to shake hands with him. No one spoke

to Frank, or took the slightest notice of him. He felt both vexed and pained. But he resolved to conciliate them, if possible. So, as soon as he could summon sufficient courage, he went toward a boy who was next to him in class, and held out his hand in a friendly manner. "How are you, Ernest?"

The lad literally turned his back upon Frank, and did not even reply.

"Gentlemanly behaviour, certainly!" said Frank, becoming rather pale.

He then went to another lad, who was standing near, and greeted him in the same way. This boy pretended neither to see nor hear; he looked straight before him, and altogether avoided him with his eyes.

"Oh, just as you please," said Frank, "I will not force my company upon you, of course."

He sat down alone, looking and feeling uncomfortable. "They cannot all be against me," he thought; "surely some of them will be friendly."

But no one came to him. Edward's friends gathered round him with genial looks and pleasant words; but Frank was as completely ignored as if he had been out of the room. He found it hard to bear. He cared very much for the good opinion of the boys, and had done some very wrong things to get it. He did not at all like their avoidance of him now.

"They will come round in time," he thought. But all that day passed, and not one of them spoke to him.

The next day Frank complained to Mr. Davis.

"I cannot help it," said the master. "Of course I am sorry that you should have to bear it;

but, as I told you, many things have come to light during your absence, and some of the boys, no doubt, blame you for what they have heard."

"I will not put up with it," said Frank.

"I do not know that you can do anything else than put up with it," said Mr. Davis.

Frank felt as if he would like to quarrel with the boys, but as it takes two to quarrel he could not well do so, since no one would speak to him. "I will make them speak," said Frank to himself. But it was more easily said than done. He tried to provoke them by saying rude things to them, but they were evidently prepared for that, and took no notice of him. It roused Frank's temper.

"What a disagreeable, unjust set you are!" he cried. "It was proved that I had not done the thing of which I was accused, but you treat me as if I had been guilty."

Then one boy spoke for the rest.

"Frank Clarence, we have decided that we will have nothing to do with you, but it is not because you were brought before the magistrates. We do not care in the least whether or not you were guilty of putting stones upon the railroad, but we do care that boys belonging to our school and wearing our caps have been dishonest, and tale-bearers, and frequenters of beershops. You have not only been bad yourself, but you have tried to make others bad; and you have not even been a true friend to your chosen companions; but have got them all into trouble by mentioning their names, and compelling them to confess that they, too, had been at the 'Dragon.'"

"Abominable!" cried Frank. "If they had possessed a grain of right feeling they would

themselves have come forward and stated what they knew without my having to mention them. Why did not you ?" he said, turning angrily to a number of the boys who were standing together.

But no one replied to him.

"Fine cowards you are to treat me so! What do *you* mean by it? You were as bad as I."

One by one the boys left the room, and Frank found himself alone. He looked from the window, and saw that a game had been begun, and the boys were soon merrily at play. He would liked to have joined them; but he knew that he would not be allowed to do so; and, feeling intensely miserable, he sat down at his desk, and tried to study. But he could not do so, for he was feeling too much agitated to think. Opening his desk to place a book in it, he found that a note had been slipped inside of it. This note was from the secretary of the cricket club; and it was written to inform him that, in accordance with the request of the whole of the members, his name had been struck off the list. This seemed to Frank the crowning trouble of all; and yet I think, if only he could have borne it patiently for a time, all would have been well.

Unfortunately, Frank resorted to quite the wrong means.

"I will bribe some of them," said he.

So he bought a bottle of wine, and privately invited three of the younger boys to partake of some. They, after first getting from him a promise not to tell the others, yielded to the temptation, and drank his wine. Frank made himself as agreeable as possible, told them interesting stories, and tried to secure their sympathy with

him in his trouble. Then he invited them to meet him at the same hour and place on the next evening.

But one of the boys confided the secret to his brother.

"Come with us," said this boy. "I am sure Frank would be glad to see you."

"I do not doubt that," said the brother; "but I shall certainly not put his hospitality to the test, and I advise you to keep away from him."

In consequence of this, only two of the boys kept their appointment. Frank suspected no danger; but as he and the two boys were standing with the glasses in their hands, Mr. Davis suddenly appeared in the midst.

"Frank Clarence," he said, looking more angry than Frank had ever seen him, "you will go at once to your room, and not leave it again until the morning, when you will take the first train and return home. I have borne with you long enough; but no forbearance seems to avail, and I will not have you a day longer in the school."

The next morning, before the boys were up, Frank went to the railway station. But he took his ticket for a town in the opposite direction from that of his home.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

## A PARTING.

THREE years passed away. Hugh had been admitted into partnership with his father, and the firm of Clarence and Son had grown greatly prosperous. Hugh possessed a large amount of business capacity, which he gladly exerted to the very utmost; and, as he brought an active brain and willing hands, and a most earnest purpose, to the work, it was no wonder that he was successful. Edward was at college, and from time to time news of him came to his home, which gladdened all the hearts that loved him. But a deep shadow rested upon them, which stole the joy from the lives of them all, frequently filling the eyes of Mrs. Clarence with tears, and making Mr. Clarence grow old before the time. For Frank had never been home since he was dismissed from the school, nor had they once heard from him. When a letter came from Mr. Davis to Mr. Clarence, stating that the former had, with great regret, been compelled to send Frank home, they expected him hourly to arrive. When that day and the next passed without their seeing him, they began to feel anxious, and made inquiries, which, however, were of no avail. Then they advertised for him in the newspapers, promising that, if he would return, he would meet with nothing but kindly welcomes; but they could not be sure that

he ever saw the advertisements ; and if he did he sent no reply. The first weeks were very terrible, and if Frank's friends had not known that they might tell their troubles to God, and He would comfort them, I do not know how they could have borne them. But He gave them strength, and after a short time He gave them hope. Edward told them how much Frank had to bear from the boys at school, and they could not but feel that he had been too severely tried. Lettice, especially, trusted her brother.

" He has doubtless procured a situation somewhere ; or perhaps he has gone abroad ; but I feel sure that he will be good and successful, and come back to make us all happy."

She was never tired of repeating these or similar words of hope and encouragement through all the weary years during which Frank made no sign. Mr. and Mrs. Clarence at length began to hope that they must be true, and to feel that, if they were patient, all would yet be well with their boy. But no one could describe the sorrow that it really was to them. Many a night they were unable to sleep for thinking of him ; and poor Lettice, who cheered the others, seldom passed a day without weeping for his loss.

But they loved him through it all, and every night and morning as they knelt together they asked God to bless him, and to bring the prodigal back to them again.

At length he came.

One evening Edward was at home for his vacation, and all were gathered together to listen to his experiences of college life, and, for a time, all seemed to feel light-hearted and happy. It

was a rare thing for Mr. and Mrs. Clarence to be so much amused as to forget their trouble, but on this evening Edward's anecdotes were particularly entertaining, and a young man who came up to the door heard, as if to greet him, a merry laugh from the family circle. The sound did not particularly please him.

"It is evident that I have not been missed or mourned," he said, as he opened the door, and at once stepped into the room where they were all assembled.

"Do not let me disturb the happy family, but here I am, safely at home again."

"Frank! Frank!"

What a moment it was! No one could describe it. All started up in amazement, which was almost terror. Only the lad's mother threw her arms around him with a cry of joy.

Mr. Clarence could not speak for some moments; afterwards they remembered that he sank into a chair, and put his hand to his heart, as if he were in pain. As soon as he could speak, he said, "Where have you been, my boy, and why did you not write to us?"

"I have been over the seas, and far away, and I did not write to you because I had nothing to say, and postage was expensive."

"Nothing to say, Frank, when you must have known how painfully anxious we have been!"

"Anxious, were you? You did not seem like it when I came in."

It was the same Frank after all. The changes which they had prayed for had not yet come. He had returned, and they were thankful for that,

but, even on that evening, some of them felt that the trouble was not really over.

Hugh with difficulty restrained himself from uttering some angry, reproachful words.

"It was not worth while to mourn for you as much as we did," he began, hotly; but a beseeching look from Lettice silenced him.

They all felt uncomfortable, and ill at ease.

"I have returned at an inopportune time," said Frank. "I had better go back again."

"There is nothing wrong with the time, excepting that it is so late," said his mother, in tender, rebuking tones.

And that was all that was said. After his long absence and cruel neglect, they each tried to make him feel that he was at home, and to conduce to his happiness.

It soon became evident that he would not have returned even then but for one reason. When he had taken some refreshment, he asked to speak to his father privately. What took place at that interview no one ever knew; the only thing that came to Hugh's knowledge was, that his father had given Frank a cheque for a large amount.

No one was sorry when the time came to retire for the night—a night which they all had reason to remember long afterward. For just after midnight the whole house was aroused by a piercing scream. The next moment the children heard their mother calling piteously for Hugh.

"What is it, mother darling? Do not be frightened," said Hugh, in calm, manly tones.

"Hugh, I am afraid your father is dying. Send for a doctor, and come to him at once."

It was too true. Mr. Clarence had been seized

with sudden illness, which was, doubtless, the result of the intense excitement consequent upon the return of Frank.

The medical man arrived, after a time which seemed almost endless to the agonised watchers. But he declared that there was no hope of recovery.

"Do not leave him a moment," he said. "He may rally sufficiently to speak, but I think he will not live many days."

The doctor's opinion proved to be a correct one.

For two days and nights Mr. Clarence lay speechless, and apparently unconscious. During this time they prayed and waited, scarcely daring to hope. Hugh proved himself strong and reliable, and was a great comfort to them all, especially the mother. Grace was quiet and sensible, and proved herself a most efficient nurse. Lettice was brought into the room, and laid upon a couch near her father.

"If he should open his eyes I think he would be glad to see me," she said, tearfully.

Edward tried to console them all. They never forgot how often he knelt beside the bed and prayed audibly, until they were all comforted with the thought of the presence and sympathy of their heavenly Father. Even the two youngest, Alfred and little Daisy, sat in the room crying quietly. Only Frank did not stay.

"I cannot bear it," he said, and went away for a walk. Several times they fetched him, thinking that there was a change; but as soon as possible he went away again.

But on the third day Mr. Clarence looked con-

sciously around. Grace went quickly to him, and lifted his head to her bosom. His wife knelt beside him in speechless love and grief. Hugh kept back the feelings that almost mastered him, and they all listened.

"I am dying," he said. "Never mind. Don't be sorry. Hugh will care for you all."

He looked at his wife tenderly. "You will come to me soon, my darling, and the children will learn to do without us."

Lettice wept aloud.

"Do not cry, Lettice, my joy," he said. "As soon as you have finished the work God gives you to do, He will call you home."

He turned to Hugh.

"Be good to poor Frank," he said. "Remember, it is love that overcomes. You will do all that is right, my son?"

"I will try, father," said Hugh.

"I am not afraid to trust you," said his father. "Where is Frank? I should like to see him before I die."

Edward went to look for him.

"Frank, come directly. Father wants you; he is quite conscious."

Frank held back in fear.

"Is he dying, Edward?"

"I think he will not live long."

"Must I come? I am so frightened; I would much rather not."

"You must come, and at once. He has asked for you."

Edward took his arm and hurried him into the room. The lips of the dying man quivered as he looked into Frank's face.

"My boy, my long-lost boy, I do not know how to give *you* up," he said. "Shall I ever see you again, Frank? Will you try to meet me in heaven?"

"I will try, father," said Frank, greatly moved. "Indeed, I will try."

"Think of the others, too, my boy, and for your father's sake do not cause them any fresh trouble."

"I hope I shall not," said Frank, sadly.

"Keep together, my children. Love each other, and care for each other, and help each other always. 'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.' This parting is not for ever. I hope we shall all meet again in a better home, where there is no more sorrow."

Presently he asked for Edward.

"Consecrate your talents to God," he said to him. "Speak most eloquently in His name. I should like you to be a minister of the Gospel, Edward. What could you do better than to spread the good tidings of salvation by Jesus Christ?"

"I could do nothing better, father. It is my prayer that I may be permitted to do that."

The answer pleased Mr. Clarence.

"I am thankful and glad to hear you say that, my son. God will give you work to do for Him if you earnestly desire it. I am hoping to serve Him much better there than I ever have done here."

There was silence for some time. Then he spoke to his wife again.

"I wonder how soon you will come," he said. "I shall be waiting for you. But I am tired now,

and should like to go to sleep. Good night, my dears. God bless you, and keep you from the evil that is in the world."

He closed his eyes, and they watched him breathlessly; but he did not wake again. So peacefully did he pass away that they never knew the precise moment when he died. Only Grace looked at Hugh with an expressive glance, and Hugh whispered a word to Edward, who said, softly, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

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## CHAPTER XV.

### CLARENCE BROTHERS.

THEY buried Mr. Clarence; and it was not until then that his children realised their loss. While his silent form lay in the chamber it seemed to them that they had their father still with them. It was only when they had borne him away to the cemetery, and left him there among the flowers, that they began to understand a little of what is in that sad word, *fatherless*. At first they could not talk to each other of their grief and their loss: the pain was too sharp to be spoken about, so that each bore it in silence. But when Mr. Clarence was laid in the tomb, and they had wept

many tears for the loneliness which settled upon them, they began to try to comfort each other. Hugh came softly to the side of Lettice. She was weeping silently, and her brother put his arm around her and kissed her.

"If we could really know the happiness he has gone to share, I do not think we could be as sorry as we are," he said.

"Perhaps not ; but I miss him so, Hugh. He loved me so tenderly always ; and I lived in the hope that I should one day be able to do something for him. I was not able to assist in nursing him, even for an hour," and Lettice's tears were more bitter as she thought of that.

"But do not let that trouble you, Lettice. He knew how much you loved him, and that it would have been the greatest joy to serve him."

"But there will never be any opportunity now. Even if I should again get strong and well I shall never be able to contribute to his pleasure."

"He will not miss it, Lettice dear. Think how much better and fuller is the happiness to which he is gone."

"Yes. I try to think of it, Hugh ; but with that thought comes the longing that I were with him."

"But what would mother do without you, Lettice ? And how much darker the world would be to me if you were gone."

"Would it, Hugh ? I fear it will be dark enough as it is. You are very young to have such heavy responsibilities laid upon you. And I am grieved to be so useless. If I were well and strong I might help you."

"You will help me as it is, Lettice. I have come to talk to you now, because I want your prayers and counsel. I do not like to tease our mother, for she seems as if she cannot bear it. She is almost heart-broken with grief."

"Yes; and we cannot wonder at it. Her loss has been even more than ours. Is it about the business that you are so anxious, Hugh?"

"Yes. I am young to carry it on alone, and yet I almost think that is what father would have wished."

"It will make you old before your time, Hugh."

"I wish it would. I should be glad to have the wisdom now which is supposed only to come much later in life."

"I think you will have it, Hugh. It will be given to you."

"I know it can be. Although I am so young, God can guide me in the right ways if I put myself, as I desire to do, entirely under His direction. I have thought much about it all, Lettice. I see that I must not expect to live the gay, joyous life which young men often do, because grave duties are before me. I must not be self-pleasing, but only solicitous for others. I must feel that I am altogether *grown-up* now."

"Poor Hugh!"

"Do not pity me, Lettice. If I were only sure of not making mistakes, I should not mind the rest."

"As soon as mamma is able to be consulted, you must talk to her about everything, Hugh."

"Yes; of course I shall do so. I hope the business will continue to prosper, so that she

can have everything which money can buy to make her comfortable."

"I hope so. It will not be your fault if it does not, Hugh."

"No; I will do all that lies in my power."

"I am sure of that. What a good thing it was that you left school when you did."

"Yes; even if we could have foreseen what was coming it could not have been managed for us better than it has been."

"God is so good to us. I am sure we may trust Him. No harm can come to us while our heavenly Father loves us, and cares for us so tenderly."

There was a gentle tap at the door, and Mrs. Clarence entered.

Hugh rose and greeted her affectionately, leading her to a chair near Lettice.

"I thought you were together," she said.

"Hugh, I wanted to speak to you, only I scarcely feel able to do so. You must take your father's place, my boy."

"Mother, I will so far as I am able," said Hugh, and his voice trembled.

"He told me only a day or two before he was taken ill that you had made yourself acquainted with all the intricacies of the business, and were quite able to manage it in his absence. He little thought then what a long absence there would be."

Mrs. Clarence could not go on for weeping.

"Do not talk about it, mother. It distresses you too much. There will be plenty of opportunities for you to tell me your wishes. For my part, I should like to follow exactly in my father's steps.

He was always an upright man, and everybody who had dealings with him respected him."

"I am sure you cannot do better than copy your father, Hugh."

"Rest now, mamma," said Lettice. "There is no need for further conversation at present."

"Yes, there is, my child. Something must be settled about Frank. I am so anxious about him. I do not know what he will agree to do."

"We must ask him," said Lettice. "We cannot decide for him; his own wishes must of course be consulted."

"We will wait until to-morrow, then," said Mrs. Clarence.

"Of course," said Hugh, "it must be as you decide, mother. If Frank chooses to join me in the business, he must begin at the beginning, and, first of all, fill a clerk's place, as I did."

"Certainly."

"But, perhaps it would be better for him to have a situation away from home. He may choose it himself."

Lettice spoke very gently, but she felt the force of her own suggestion. She had a deep and strong conviction that it would be for the happiness of all of them if Frank were away from home.

"I do not know what to think of it," said Mrs. Clarence. "I should like to keep my children together if it were possible. Your father's death seems to have left a serious impression on Frank. I cannot help hoping that it may be the turning point in his history."

"Oh, yes; Frank will not always be a trouble to us," said Hugh, hopefully.

But the next morning Frank rather turned their hope to fear.

"I want some money, Hugh," he said ; "and you will please to tell me how we shall arrange in the future. Of course I am not coming to you every time I want a few pounds. I have as much right to the property as you have."

"I am the eldest son," said Hugh quickly, and without thinking of the probable consequences of such a remark.

"So you are. I shall no doubt be made to feel that pretty keenly, but all the same for your being the oldest son, I shall look after my rights, and be sure that I get them."

"Frank, we are brothers. I do not want anything but what is right. My great desire is to carry out our father's wishes, so far as they are known to me. But if you will say what you really wish you shall have it, if it be possible."

"Now, Hugh, no doubt you consider that is a very gracious speech to come from the eldest son to his scapegrace brother ; but I will not be spoken to in any such way. It is possible to have what I wish, and I tell you frankly that I will consent to no other arrangement."

"What is it that you wish, Frank ?"

"Simply this : that the name of the firm be altered to 'Clarence Brothers,' and that you and I are partners, sharing the profits equally between us."

"Frank !"

"Well, that is a fair enough proposal. Why do you stare at me so ? Have I not made myself understood ?"

"You cannot know what you are talking about. You are perfectly ignorant of all that concerns the business."

"That is my misfortune, and not my fault. But it does not matter very much. As you are such a model fellow you can do the work for both of us; only of course I shall be always consulted, and I shall reserve to myself the right of appropriating my share of the money to any purpose I please."

"But, Frank, you and I cannot take the concern into our own hands, even if we wished it. To all intents and purposes it belongs to our mother. She has the only right to it."

"But she cannot manage it."

"No; but I can manage it for her."

"That is precisely what you will not do. In that case I should be shut out, and I tell you I will never consent to that."

"Well, Frank, you must be reasonable. If you wish to have a share in our father's business, of course you must make yourself acquainted with all its details. You must begin at the bottom and work your way up, as I did."

"Do you mean that I am first to be a clerk?"

"Certainly."

Frank arose in great anger. "What are you thinking about? A fine brotherly fellow you must be to propose such a thing. I tell you I will not be your servant. I will be in all respects your equal, and that without the loss of a single day."

Frank raised his voice in his anger.

"Oh, do be quiet," said Hugh. "Do not let us grieve our mother by seeming to quarrel on

this first day after our father's funeral. Let us talk the matter over patiently."

"I will not talk it over with you. I will see what mother has to say about it."

He went at once into his mother's room.

"Mother, is it your will that I should be treated as a servant, and have no share in my father's business, because I happen to be only the second son?"

Mrs. Clarence looked at her boys with a very sinking heart. But she trusted Hugh thoroughly.

"What is the matter, Frank? I am sure Hugh will do what is right and fair."

"I am sure he will not unless he is made. You must exert your authority, mother, if justice is to be done."

"What is it that you wish, Frank?"

"I wish to be a partner with Hugh in the business, and I only ask what I have a perfect right to claim."

"But you are so young, my boy."

"And so is Hugh."

"And you are inexperienced."

"But I could gain experience. I am willing to learn all that needs to be learnt, and I will work and do my best for us all, mother, if I am treated rightly in this matter."

"You must have time to think, mother," said Hugh; "and time to consult with your friends. It is not a matter to be decided hastily."

"But will you agree to what we think is best, Hugh?"

"Certainly, mother. Have no fear on my account."

"It must be as I wish, mother," said Frank, "or I shall not stay in England."

"Do not say so, Frank. It will break my heart to be deprived of any of my children."

"It will not be my fault," said Frank, obstinately.

Many consultations were held afterwards upon the matter. Lettice and Edward both thought it would be better for them all if Frank had no responsible position in the business. Every one to whom they appealed for advice said the same.

"It will be most absurd and unwise," said an old friend of their father.

But their mother clung to the hope that it would be for Frank's good.

"I cannot bear the thought of losing him," she said. "Perhaps a complete reformation would be effected in his character if he felt that we were in some sort all dependent upon him. I should like it to be tried."

"Very well, mother dear," said Hugh. "Of course it shall be as you wish."

"And you will not anger your brother, Hugh. You will watch over him, of course, and try to lead him into all that is right; but I know you will be patient and forbearing too."

"I will try, mother."

"And I still hope it will be for his good. If it be the means of saving Frank from wrongdoing we shall all of us be thankful."

"It will at least be well to keep him at home with us," said Lettice, but she said it with a sigh. She hoped for the best; but she had very little confidence in Frank.

He had his way. As soon as their affairs could be settled, the name of the firm was changed, and henceforth became known as Clarence Brothers.

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CHAPTER XVI.

SAVED — FOR WHAT ?

SEVERAL months had passed since the death of Mr. Clarence.

Hugh and Frank were working together quite as well as could be expected. Frank was sometimes unreasonable, and very often he was careless, but Hugh was always firm, and when he believed himself in the right he was very resolute to have his way. They might often have said hard words to each other, but love for their mother made them silent.

"It would almost kill me if my two boys should ever cease to love each other," she said to them often, and for her sake Frank became yielding, and Hugh very gentle.

The management of the business was not left entirely in the hands of the two brothers. The services of an old man, who had proved himself confidential and trustworthy, were retained ; and the two lads owed much to him for his candour and far-seeing wisdom.

So far everything prospered still. But the

home which missed the father's presence was sad and gloomy, and the children wondered sometimes whether it would ever be bright again.

Mrs. Clarence seemed to have grown many years older. Lettice had not been so well since the father's death, and even sunny Grace had not regained her brightness.

"I should like to see some smiles upon mother's face again," said Hugh, one evening when they were all in a room together, and were yet so silent that they heard Mrs. Clarence sigh.

"We must give our mother time," said Grace.

"I wish you would listen to a suggestion that I have to make," said Frank. "Why should we not go away to the sea for a holiday together?"

No one responded, as Frank had hoped. Lettice shook her head wearily, and Hugh looked very grave.

"It would do us all good," persisted Frank. "Mother needs a change, and so does Lettice."

"But how could I travel?" asked Lettice.

"We need not go very far, and there are plenty of us to take care of you. It can all be managed easily enough if mother and Hugh will consent."

"I could not go with you," said Hugh.

"You might come to us for a few days; but even if not that is no good reason why the rest of us should not go," replied Frank.

"It would be a very sad holiday for us all," said Mrs. Clarence.

"It need not be so, mother," said Frank.

"We would do what we could to make it bright for you; and the sea would be beautiful now. Besides, Edward could go with us. He keeps so

closely at his books that it makes him look quite pale and thin. It would be exceedingly good for him, and he would greatly enjoy it."

"Perhaps he would," said the mother, half-yielding, though still hesitating.

"He certainly would," said Frank, confidently.

"And so would we all. Lettice, would not you like it? You could be drawn about in a Bath-chair, you know, and see the cliffs and the waves, and feel the breezes, and I believe you would get better."

"Would you like it, Lettice?" asked Mrs. Clarence.

"I should like it, mother, if that were all."

"What do you say, Hugh?"

"I say go, mother, if you feel any inclination. It may be just what you need. I feel sure that father would approve. He liked us to be happy."

"Yes, he did."

"You say yes, do you not, mother?" cried Frank, eagerly.

"Yes."

"Then we will soon be away by the sea. There is no need for loss of time. I will manage it all, Hugh. You can trust me so far, cannot you?"

"Oh, yes!" said Hugh, smiling.

Frank showed that he could at least do some things uncommonly well, for in a very few days all the family were at the seaside, with the exception of Hugh.

They had gone to a little unfashionable place, where they could be as quiet as they pleased; but the young folks were greatly delighted with the change. Edward especially enjoyed it. He had

worked hard during the last few months, and his holiday had come just in time to be pleasant.

"I shall take care of mother," he said to Hugh, as they parted.

"Yes; I trust her to your care," said Hugh.

And Edward carried out his promise. He was nearly always with his mother. The others went off for long walks and excursions, but Edward, Lettice, and their mother spent quiet hours upon the sands. Very happy times they were, too. Edward did not care to talk about himself, nor did he love to describe the dreams of the future with which his thoughts were often filled. But his mother and sister listened so gladly, that he was often induced to tell them what was in his mind, and what successes had attended him.

On one occasion they had passed together a long afternoon on the beach, as they loved best to spend it. Lettice was lying upon pillows which Edward had brought for her. Mrs. Clarence was sitting upon a camp stool, and Edward was lounging upon the sand. They had talked much of the life that lay before them, and a little of the trouble which was so fresh upon their hearts; and then they passed away from the present life to talk of that higher life which they had hoped of living together, and which was already commenced by one who was and would always be very dear to them each. So the time passed more swiftly than they had been aware of.

"How late it is!" said Mrs. Clarence presently. "And we have kept you with us all the afternoon, Edward. It is too bad."

"But I enjoy it better than anything, mother, dear."

"But we must not let you stay with us so, Edward. You must leave Frank sometimes."

"Yes, for you need to have long walks as much as Frank," said Lettice.

"I wonder where Frank has gone now," said their mother, a little uneasily. "They ought to have returned an hour ago. Grace would not forget if Frank did. I hope they have not got into danger."

"Oh, no! it is not at all likely," said Edward.

"But it is very late," said Lettice. "Which way did they take, mamma?"

"They went over the cliff, but Grace said as it was low water they would go down the steps, and walk along under the rocks."

"They are safe enough," said Edward. "It takes a much longer time than one would suppose to walk a couple of miles over shingle."

"But Grace would know we should be anxious. I wonder what is keeping them."

"Shall I take you and Lettice in, mother, and then go and look for the truants?"

"I wish you would, my boy. It would relieve my anxiety."

As quickly as possible Edward walked along the beach, but he could not see those whom he sought. Then he climbed the cliff, and looked with no greater success. When he had walked and ran, and still could not see them, he, too, began to feel anxious. But he kept on hoping at each turn to find them. Presently he heard a cry of joy, "Edward! Edward!"

"Grace how is it you are waiting here? It is past the hour at which you ought to have returned. Mother is anxious about you."

"But I dare not go back, Edward."

"You dare not. Why?"

"Because Frank is missing."

• "How came he to be missing? What has become of him?"

"He did a foolish thing, for which I blamed him at the time. We saw a boat in a little cove yonder, and Frank has gone out in it."

"Foolish boy! But of course he is safe enough. You had better come without him."

"But I am afraid he is not safe, Edward. He does not know how to manage a boat."

"Nonsense! There is nothing in the world more easy to manage than a boat. I am glad you are not in it, but surely he can take care of himself."

"But he cannot swim. Hugh once told me that Frank would never learn when the other boys in the school did."

• "That is true; but surely he can keep his boat from upsetting. Go home, all of you, and be careful not to frighten mother. I will look for him; he must be somewhere round that point."

"Yes, he is."

Edward ran as fast as he could, jumping from rock to rock, until he had gained the other side of the cliff; but he could not see his brother.

Then he climbed to one of the heights, that his eyes might be able to see farther, and presently he saw a boat with one individual in it, who he had no doubt was Frank. He waited and watched breathlessly, and could soon see that Frank was evidently making great efforts to gain the land, but his strength seemed almost exhausted.

Edward ran along to the edge of the cliff, and

then let himself down, so as to be nearer. Then he shouted encouraging words :—

“Come in to shore, Frank, come.”

For some time he called, and Frank did not seem to hear. At last he caught sight of the figure on the land, and listened.

“Come,” said Edward.

“I cannot! I am so tired,” said Frank.

“Keep up your courage a little longer. Come this way.”

“I do not know how.”

The voice was very faint. Edward could scarcely hear it. He shouted across some plain directions, making a trumpet of his hands, that the sound might travel farther. But Frank seemed unable to understand. Still he did manage to come a little nearer to the land.

But Edward was grieved to find that the wind was growing stronger, for a storm was coming up.

“I shall have to swim across to him,” he thought. “And yet I fear it is too far. I should not have strength to reach him.”

But, presently, Frank cried out in fear, and the cry came across the water to the place where his younger brother watched. Instantly Edward threw off some of his clothes.

“Lord, help me,” he cried. It was Edward’s habit always to lift up his voice to God for help and guidance in all that he did. “Lord help me, and if I am drowned comfort my mother, and take me to heaven with Thee for ever, for Christ’s sake.”

The next moment he was in the water, and swiftly passing through the waves.

Edward was a skilful swimmer, and he was also strong; but he needed all his strength and skill at this time.

Frank saw him coming, and gave a cry of joy. Edward did not reply. It was enough for him that every stroke brought him nearer to his brother in peril.

But, when he thought the danger was almost over, he had fresh need of courage and strength. For Frank tried once more to bring the boat in the direction which he wished, and whether he moved to one side of it, or whether a fresh gust of wind took it, he could not afterwards remember, but the next instant the boat was overturned, and he was in the sea.

He threw up his arms with a shriek of terror, and disappeared. Then Edward's heart sank within him. But soon he came to the surface, and Edward caught him. Frank clung wildly to his brother.

"Oh, Frank, don't! we shall both be drowned," cried Edward. "Put your arms and feet down, and hold your breath, so as to float one moment, while I right the boat. God help us!"

God did help them. In a moment or two they were both sitting in the bottom of the boat, pale and panting, but safe. They cried together, for they were faint with exhaustion.

"The oars are gone," said Frank, presently.

"So they are. No! Here is another pair lashed to the sides of the boat. Oh, Frank, how good God has been to us!"

"You have saved my life, Edward! You have saved my life!"

"Yes, I have saved your life, Frank."

The brothers looked in each others' eyes. They would never forget that moment as long as they lived.

"I hope you will never be sorry for what you have done, Edward."

"Sorry, Frank?"

"Yes; sorry because the life proves to have been so little worth."

"I hope not. I trust not."

"So do I. But there is so much evil in me that I do not know."

Edward looked up, and Frank understood the meaning of the glance; and I think he prayed most earnestly on that day for help from above.

"We must get home as quickly as possible. Mother and the others will be so much alarmed."

The boat was soon put back in its place.

"I ought not to have moved it," said Frank. "A little wrong may bring a good deal of pain and perplexity."

Edward thought his brother seemed very much softened and subdued by what had happened.

When they reached the house at which they were staying, they were welcomed with tears of joy.

"Tell us all about it," said Lettice. "We feared some harm had befallen you, Frank."

"Harm had befallen me," said Frank. "I should have been drowned if Edward had not saved my life."

And he told gently, so as not to move them more than was necessary, all that had happened.

"I shall never forget it," Frank said.

His mother put her arms around him.

"I am glad it was your brother who saved you, my boy," she said.

"So am I," said Edward, "but we will not make too much of it."

"You are saved; but for what, Frank?"

There was a wistfulness in his mother's voice which Frank well understood. He kissed her, and did not reply. Lettice answered for him.

"He is saved that he may spend a good and useful life," she said.

The event made a lasting impression upon both Edward and Frank.

"I have saved his life," said Edward to himself, "and I must watch over him always. I must not let myself get too engrossed with my studies, or even with the works I am trying to do, and forget my brother. Surely, in letting me save his life, God has told me that he is to have my loving care and watchfulness. Poor Frank! it is hard for him to be good; and we who are strong must help the weak."

"My life has been saved," said Frank to himself, through the silent hours of that night.

"Will there ever come a day when Edward will wish he had let me be drowned? I hope not! I pray that such may never be."

And then a very earnest prayer arose from Frank's lips.

"Oh, God of my father and mother, and brother, keep me from the evil that is in the world."

CHAPTER XVII.

AN OFFER FOR HUGH.

WHILE his mother, and brothers, and sisters were at the seaside, it must be confessed that Hugh felt a little lonely. He had, however, the best possible cure for loneliness close at hand, for there is nothing like hard work to remove dullness, and he had plenty of that. Indeed, so busy was he generally, that he had very little time to think of how he felt. The worst part of the day was the evening, for then he came home from the office, and naturally felt as if he would like to see those who were dear to him.

Letters often came from the holiday-makers, which filled him with joy. Lettice especially wrote interesting letters to her brother. They were not merely "My dear brother, I hope you are quite well. We are all happy and safe. Write soon. Love from all." This is the sort of letter which many people at the seaside send to their friends at home, who are thinking of them and longing for tidings. But Lettice knew that Hugh would scarcely be satisfied with such as that. So she wrote graphic letters, full of cheerful words and information, telling him where they had been, and what they had seen, and all that had happened to them.

Hugh went home every day, hoping to find one of these letters waiting for him. And he was not

often disappointed, for Mrs. Clarence thought much of the son who was absent from them, and thought that the least they could do would be to write to him frequently.

One evening he went home and found a letter, as usual. He opened it eagerly, and read the account of Frank's narrow escape from drowning. He was thankful that his brother had been saved, and he thought very hopefully of the future which was before Frank.

"He will never forget the circumstance as long as he lives," thought Hugh, "and whenever he thinks of it he will afresh resolve that the life which has been thus spared shall be consecrated to good and useful purposes."

He wrote back to Frank a kind, brotherly letter, congratulating him upon the escape he had made, and hinting at the trouble which would have fallen upon them all if he had not been rescued.

"It is no good preaching to him," he thought. "Frank will not like written sermons any better than he likes those which are spoken. But I feel sure that there is no need to preach either. The occurrence itself will be the best preacher to which Frank could possibly listen."

In the letter was a small note written by the mother.

"Cannot you come to us for a few days, my dear boy?" it said. "We are enjoying the holiday very much, but many times during the day one of us says, 'I wish Hugh were here.' I wish it too. It would be a good conclusion to a pleasant holiday. Is it not possible for you to come?"

Hugh thought it was, and resolved to try to

spend the last few days with the rest of the family.

Perhaps this resolution made him unusually cheerful. But from some cause or other Hugh began to sing. He forgot that, as it had been a very warm day, all the windows were open. He sang loudly and heartily, for he loved singing now, and delighted to exercise his voice. At first he sang little snatches of things that happened to come into his mind. But then he took down a music book, and opened the piano.

"I may as well spend the next hour in this way, as in any other," he thought.

So he sang piece after piece, accompanying himself as he did so.

Of course he could not sing and play and look out of the window at the same time, so he did not notice that a gentleman who was passing had stopped to listen to his singing.

This gentleman waited very patiently in the street with his eyes fixed upon the window through which the sounds came, and looked greatly delighted at what he heard.

"That young man has a very fine voice," he remarked to another gentleman who was passing.

"Very," was the short reply. The latter person was not a musical enthusiast.

The old gentleman listened for more than an hour, although many people looked at him curiously as he waited. It was almost dark when Hugh closed the piano and lighted the gas, resolving to spend the next hour at his books. Then the old gentleman walked away, talking to himself as he went.

"I must find out who and what he is! He

cannot be allowed to remain in obscurity. He would become quite a celebrity with proper training. It is a long time since I heard anything so good as that voice."

An hour after the old gentleman came back to the house and listened again. But Hugh had finished his singing for that day.

The next day the gentleman was again in the street in which Hugh Clarence lived ; but Hugh was away early.

In the evening, however, he sang again, and again the old gentleman listened with delight.

On the next evening the stranger did not come alone, but brought two other gentlemen with him, who walked to and fro, stopping occasionally to listen.

"I was not mistaken?" said he who had first come.

"No ; it is a splendid voice."

"Do you advise me to secure the young man, if possible?"

"Certainly. You will be repaid any outlay if he can be brought before the public."

It was growing dark, and Hugh was singing rather dreamily, thinking of many things besides the words, when a card was brought to him.

"The gentleman will be particularly obliged if you will see him, Mr. Hugh. He says he has an important proposition to make," said the servant.

"He is a stranger to me," thought Hugh, "and I do not care about receiving strangers ; but of course I must admit this gentleman since he wishes it."

A minute or two afterwards, Hugh had entered into conversation with a gentleman who was well

known among all musical circles, but whom Hugh had never seen before.

"I must apologise for my intrusion," said the gentleman; "but as I was passing the other evening I heard some one singing. May I ask if you are the owner of the voice to which I listened?"

"I do not know, indeed," said Hugh; "and yet I suppose I must have been, for I am the only member of the family who is at home."

"Do you know, young man, that you have a very wonderful voice?"

"I was not aware that there was anything particular about my voice. It is pretty strong, I believe?"

"Strong? Yes, it is strong; but that is not all—it is a splendid voice."

"Is it, indeed?" said Hugh, rather amused than otherwise by the stranger's earnestness.

"It is indeed, sir. It is a voice of which any young man may be proud."

"I am much obliged to you for telling me so."

"And what are you going to do?"

"Do with what?—my voice? I shall be more willing to sing when I am asked than I have been before, of course, since you assure me that my voice can give pleasure to those who hear it."

"But where do you intend to sing?"

"Here in this room, to my friends, of course."

"But something better is before you, my friend. You can gain a competency, if not a fortune, by singing."

"How?"

"I will take upon myself the duty and expenses of your training, and then I will introduce you to the public."

"The public? Do you think I would be a public singer?"

"And pray, why not? Many a good man has been a public singer, and why should not you? There is no disgrace in such a profession?"

"Oh, no; but if it were the most honourable profession in the world I could not engage in it."

"Yes, you could; and I think when once you had tasted the delights of it, and been applauded and encored, and seen the pleasure with which thousands of people listened to you, you would not lightly cast it off for any other. Do you not think you would like it?"

"I think I might like it," said Hugh, and in truth he felt at the moment as if he would enjoy it very much indeed.

"I am sure you would. There are few things like it. It is a great privilege to give delight to thousands of people."

"But even if I could do so, I am not at liberty to enter into any engagements of the kind."

"But I think it is your duty. God has given you the voice you have. Do you not think you would be wrong not to cultivate and improve the talent? Do you not feel that it is your duty not to allow it to be wasted?"

"But He has given me other duties to perform."

"Not such as would interfere with those that I have pointed out, I imagine."

"Yes, I am my mother's eldest son; and my father is dead. The chief responsibilities of our business lie upon me."

"But that is not a sufficient reason for your declining my offer. Any one can manage a busi-

ness, but it is not one in twenty thousand who can sing as you can."

Hugh did not speak for a few minutes. He was rather tempted by the stranger's words. He began to feel a little vain of his gift, and to doubt whether, if he really possessed it, he ought not to be doing something better than spending his days at a desk. He had good business qualifications and he enjoyed his work. But there were times when he felt the drudgery of it. He remembered this, and as the two occupations came before him he was rather fascinated by the picture which the stranger in a few words had painted for him. But he recollected that it was not of himself he must think now. He had to care for his mother and sisters, and at thought of them he grew stronger.

"No, sir. My place is at home ; I cannot listen to your proposal, though I do not doubt that you have been prompted by kindness to make it."

"But surely it would grieve your friends if they were the means of hindering your advancement in life."

"I am sure they would not wish to do that. But I shall keep your offer a secret from my mother. I know that she would rather that I should stay with her, and give my attention to my father's business than enter an engagement that might after all prove a failure."

"I am not afraid of failure. I will risk all the expense that is incurred, and undertake to provide you for two years with all you need, and after that to place you in a position in which you will receive a good income."

"You are very kind ; but indeed I feel sure it would not be right."

"You might be able to help your friends if you were to be very successful. At least, I think you should consult your mother."

"I know, without asking, what my mother would wish. I will not give her the pain of feeling that she has disappointed me ; or that I have had to make any sacrifice for her sake."

The gentleman rose to leave.

"You shall have time to think of it," said he. "If you should change your mind during the next month write to me at the address which I will leave with you, and I will see you again with pleasure. You will excuse my having introduced myself to you with so little ceremony ?"

"Certainly. I have no doubt it was very kind, and if circumstances had been different I might gladly have availed myself of your kindness."

"And you will still exercise your voice ?"

"Yes ; and if I can spare time I shall take lessons in singing."

"And perhaps one day you will be able to sing as a profession."

"No, I shall never do that. My mind is quite made up."

When the gentleman had left Hugh thought the matter over.

"I will say nothing about it to any one," said he, "and I will dismiss the subject from my mind, lest it should make me discontented with my present lot."

And Hugh kept the resolution which he had made.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOPE FOR LETTICE.

A DAY or two afterwards, to his great joy, Hugh thought that he might take a few days from business and join his family by the sea. He felt very glad. He knew that the change would be delightful for many reasons, and that he would enjoy it exceedingly. Nor was the pleasure all his own. Those whom he longed to see wished for his presence as much as he for theirs, and almost counted the hours until he should come. When he arrived at the railway station all, excepting Lettice, had come to meet him.

"That is right, Hugh! The last days of the holiday will be the best days, I am sure, now you have come," said Edward.

"How are you all? How is the mother?"

"I am quite well, Hugh. Do I not look so?"

"You are all sunburnt, certainly; and I think mother does really look much better. And so you have had a happy time?"

"A splendid time," said Frank, speaking for all.

Hugh offered his arm to his mother, who clung to her son fondly, as if she felt that he was her strongest support.

"It is good to have you, my boy," she said, gently, and the words and the action sent a thrill

of gladness to Hugh's heart. At that moment he remembered the offer which the stranger had made, and felt thankful that he had not been so misguided as to entertain it. It was better to feel that he was a comfort to his mother than to receive the applause of a great crowd.

"And how is Lettice?"

"That is the one anxiety which casts the shadow upon our joy. We think Lettice is not so well."

"Is she not?"

There was a tone of great disappointment and regret in Hugh's voice. Grace noticed it, and hastened to speak cheerfully.

"I think Lettice has been pining for a sight of her brother. She will perhaps be better now that Hugh has come."

"Has she been able to get out at all?"

"Oh, yes; she has been out every day until yesterday, and then she had a kind of fainting fit, and has not felt very well since."

"Do not be alarmed, Hugh," said their mother, seeing how grave his face became. "I think it is nothing that cannot be cured in a few days. Now that you have come you will be able to tell us what you think; and if she is not better to-morrow we may perhaps consult some medical man."

"There is not the slightest cause for alarm," said Frank. "I have frequently seen Lettice much worse than she is now. What kind of journey did you have, Hugh? Had you pleasant company?"

"I had a comfortable journey and plenty of good society. Everybody seems bent on holiday-

keeping. I felt quite glad that I too had so pleasant a prospect."

"I wish you could have been with us all the time," said Edward.

"Oh, that would have been extravagance. I am so well that I am not sure that I need a holiday at all."

"You need it quite as much as I."

"Well, I am going to have one too."

"I wonder you could tear yourself away from the office to which you are so much devoted," said Frank.

"I managed to do it without experiencing much grief," said Hugh. "Indeed, I feel like a school-boy again."

"It is not so very long since you were one," said Grace.

"Indeed, I have been grown up a long time," said Hugh. "I assure you that I feel quite old and grave."

"It is a good thing. We want some serious member to make up a good family."

Arrived at the house where they were staying, Hugh lost not a moment in seeking Lettice. She welcomed her brother with a bright, happy smile.

"Dear Hugh, I am so glad you have come."

But Hugh's heart failed him as he saw his sister.

"Are you much worse, Lettice? Do you feel very ill?"

"Oh, no, dear. I think it is only a passing indisposition. I have felt a little poorly during the last two or three days, that's all."

"I hoped so much from this change for you."

"I know you did, Hugh, and so did I. But

perhaps in the end we shall not be disappointed. Our Father knows what is best for us."

"Oh, Lettice, I hope you will not have to suffer more. You could not bear it."

"I should be helped to bear it if it were sent, Hugh; but I trust it may not be. One does get tired of pain."

"Lettice, I feel as if I cannot bear it, if you can. It is terrible to watch you suffer."

"Do not think about it, Hugh. I am not afraid, neither must you be."

"To-morrow I shall summon a physician."

"I hope you will not, Hugh."

"Why not?"

"Because of the expense. I have cost you all too much already."

But Hugh was quite resolved; and somehow they all, including Lettice, were beginning to yield obedience to Hugh.

"When Lettice can spare you, and you have taken some refreshment, I want you for a few minutes, brother Hugh."

It was Edward who spoke.

"I want him, too," said the mother, "and I almost think my claim is the greatest of any."

"And I want him, too," said Grace; "but I suppose as I am only a girl I must wait."

Hugh thought it was very delightful to be wanted by them all; and they spent a very pleasant evening together.

When the night came, and they had retired to rest, Hugh renewed the resolutions which he had made when his father died.

"I will devote myself to them all," he said, "and try, as far as I can, to fill my father's place."

Their happiness shall be dearer to me than my own, and I will try to serve them in every possible way."

He not only made the promise to himself, but he told God what was in his heart, and asked for His strength to conquer temptation, and His guidance to show him always what he should do.

Then he looked out at the twinkling lights upon the sea, and the bright stars in the skies above, and he felt that he need not be afraid of whatever darkness might be in his life, for God would always give him some light.

In the morning his first thought was one of joy at finding himself by the sea; but quickly following that was one of sorrow, as he thought of Lettice. He was afraid that she was really worse, and he felt as if he would be very glad if he might bear the pain for her.

He made inquiries as to who was the most clever and experienced man in the town, and called at his house. He thought it better to put him in possession of all the facts of Lettice's illness, so that he might the better know how to treat the present attack.

It was quite early in the morning when the doctor called.

"Lettice," said Hugh, "a physician has come to see you."

"Oh, Hugh, how could you send for him? It will do no good, I feel sure."

"You cannot tell. But, of course, as he has come you must see him."

"I do so under protest."

The doctor made an unusually long call. He

asked Lettice a great many questions, and looked very thoughtful.

"Do you feel very ill, Miss Clarence?"

"Not now. I have suffered a good deal of pain, but for several months it has not been nearly as bad, until two days ago."

"You are never quite well?"

"Never."

"What does your own physician say as to your chances of recovery?"

"He told me from the first that I could not recover."

"And do you think his opinion a correct one?"

"Certainly; I have no doubt about it. He did not tell me that I should die, but he told me that I should always be an invalid."

"Do you feel to be gaining or losing strength?"

"I can scarcely tell. On the whole, until this attack, I think I was gaining it."

When the doctor had left Lettice Hugh met him. As he did so, he could not help remembering the time when Mr. Clarence spoke privately to the doctor, and learnt for the first time that there was no hope of recovery for Lettice.

Hugh feared he could not tell what terrible tidings, for the doctor's face looked very grave.

"I am going to make a request of you," said the doctor. "I should be glad if you would ask your family medical attendant to come here and have a consultation, with me upon this case. Can it be done?"

"Certainly. I will send at once. Do you apprehend any danger, doctor?"

Hugh could scarcely utter the words, he felt so fearful and sad.

"Oh, no, there is certainly no danger at present."

"Thank you. I will send for our doctor. He will, perhaps, arrive later in the day."

"Then I will call again in the evening."

"I should like to know what you think of my sister."

"I think hers is a most interesting case," said the doctor, with a smile; "but I would rather not say more about it until we have held our consultation."

Lettice was rather vexed at the whole proceeding.

"It is making a great fuss for nothing," she said. "Perhaps, after all, there is nothing fresh the matter, and what a pity it is that you should have incurred the extra expense."

"I am glad we have decided to send," said Hugh.

"How dolefully you speak, Hugh," said Lettice, laughingly. "Did the doctor tell you bad news?"

"No; but I am oppressed by a fear that something is about to happen."

"It is time you came for a holiday, Hugh. I declare you are growing quite superstitious."

"Are not you afraid, Lettice?"

"Not the very least, Hugh."

Poor Hugh did not at all enjoy his first day by the sea.

"I am sorry it has happened so," said their mother, "and I think you may be unduly distressing yourself about Lettice. It seems to me that she is better to-day."

"I am quite sure that she is no worse," said Grace, confidently.

But no one was prepared for what happened on that evening. The doctor who had attended the Clarence family for many years came, and he and the new doctor had a very long private conversation. Then they visited Lettice together, and after that they had another talk.

When Hugh was beginning to feel that he could not bear the suspense much longer, but that he must intrude upon the privacy of the doctors if no one spoke to him, he was summoned.

"Well, Mr. Hugh," said their friend, Dr. Ralph, "you are looking very anxious about this affair."

"I feel very anxious," said Hugh.

"But you must try to be hopeful, instead of anxious. I have some news that will rather startle you. Dr. Jones thinks that I have misunderstood your sister's case; and I confess that he has thrown fresh light upon it. After a patient investigation of all the symptoms, we agree in believing that Miss Clarence's malady is not incurable, but that there is great hope that she may again become well and strong. Dr. Jones recommends an entirely new method of treatment, and I strongly advise you to allow him to try what he can do."

Hugh felt as if he were dreaming.

"I must talk with the other members of the family," said he. "But if there be any remedy likely to succeed, we shall be united in wishing that it may be tried."

"We will wait for your decision," said Dr. Ralph.

CHAPTER XIX.

LETTICE LEFT BEHIND.

"WHAT is the matter, Hugh?"

"Nothing is the matter."

But they all gathered about him with some anxiety, for it was a very unusual circumstance to see Hugh's face look almost perfectly colourless, as it did on that day, when he had spent a few minutes in private conversation with the doctor.

Lettice looked at him, and for a moment her own face became paler.

"The doctor's verdict is an unfavourable one," she thought; and it must be confessed that her heart sank within her, for she could not well bear the thought of having any more suffering. But, after a moment's fear, she thought of the Saviour, who had prayed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt;" and, thinking of Him and of His words, she grew brave and strong.

"What do the doctors say about me, Hugh? Do they think I am going to die?"

"No, Lettice, they think—— Oh, Lettice, I do not know how to tell you."

"Compose yourself, my son," said Mrs. Clarence. "Tell me first what the doctors have said. It is not like you to break in upon Lettice with the bad news."

"But it is not bad news, mother. It is wonder-

fully good news. The doctors think that Lettice may yet be cured."

"Oh, Hugh!"

As Lettice uttered the exclamation it was evident that she was very deeply moved. Hugh almost regretted having spoken as he did, and thought he had been too premature. But he did it hoping for the best, and now he feared he had not done wisely.

They all pressed towards Lettice, and the heart of every one in the room beat more rapidly.

"Lettice, Lettice! If it should be so, I will give my whole life in praise to God for His great goodness."

It was Grace who spoke, and the faltering of her voice told of the intense emotion which she felt. Mrs. Clarence put her arms around Lettice, and held her close in speechless love.

Frank and Edward stood looking earnestly first at Hugh and then at their sister.

"Are you sure you did not misunderstand the doctors, Hugh?"

"Quite sure, Edward. Do you think I should make a mistake about such a thing as that?"

"But it seems too good to be true."

"It does," said Frank; "and yet I do not know why we should say so. Very often things are much better than we expect."

"Yes," said Edward, gravely; "God is better to us than we even hope for."

As soon as they were able to talk quietly about the matter, which was as soon as time had quieted the feeling that the hope had excited, there was the greatest unanimity in their opinion.

"Dr. Jones really believes he can cure her?"

"Yes, he does. He is quite a young man, but Dr. Ralph says he is very clever."

"And Dr. Ralph advises us to trust Lettice to him?"

"Yes, he does, and seems to have great hope for the result."

"And you are willing, Lettice?"

"Certainly. Dr. Jones is so kind and good that I feel sure he will do all that is right."

Hugh smiled at that remark, and remembered it long afterwards.

"Dr. Jones is a perfect stranger to you, Lettice, and yet you trust him completely. I suppose you are quick to read character. For my part, I prefer to wait, at least a day or two, before I pronounce him so good."

"We shall all see him when he calls again, I suppose," said Grace.

"Of course, I shall wish to know something more of him before I feel quite assured of his skill," said Mrs. Clarence.

But she was not very difficult to convince.

Dr. Jones came for their answer, and they were all charmed with him. He had the greatest faith with regard to Lettice.

"I think I understand the case thoroughly," he said. "I shall be glad to introduce you to a lady who has been a patient of mine, who was ill longer than Miss Clarence has been, and who had not so good a constitution, but who is perfectly well now. Miss Clarence has youth on her side, which the lady of whom I speak had not, and I cannot but hope that a few months will effect a great change."

"We shall never be able to thank you enough,

Dr. Jones, if you succeed in curing her," said Edward.

"But perhaps you will not approve of the proposal which I am about to make? I should like to remove Miss Clarence to an institution with which I am connected."

The brothers and sisters looked very blankly at each other on hearing this.

"What sort of an institution is it, Dr. Jones?"

"It is merely a house where patients who are similarly afflicted are gathered together, and where they have first-rate attention and nursing."

"I am not going to have Lettice sent to an hospital," said Hugh, stoutly.

"This is not an hospital in the ordinary sense of the term," said Dr. Jones. "It is merely a place prepared for the convenience of patients, and of course it has all necessary appliances for effecting a cure. It is here, close to the sea; and we have the advantage of the highest medical talent which the country possesses."

"Let me try it," said Lettice.

"But we are all returning in a day or two, Lettice. You would not like to be left behind?" said Hugh.

"We cannot think of such a thing," said Frank.

"I assure you that Miss Clarence will have every possible comfort," said Dr. Jones. "Of course you can visit her when you please; and she is not so ill but that she can write to you frequently."

"Mother, you will not hesitate, will you? Indeed, I should like to stay very much. I think it will do me good."

Mrs. Clarence looked at Dr. Jones very ear-

nestly. He was a young man, but he had a pleasant, kindly face, and a face which seemed the index of a good character.

"I think I can rely upon you, Dr. Jones; and I will trust my child to this institution on your recommendation."

And then Dr. Jones seemed to shrink from the responsibility.

"I will bring an older and more trustworthy man to give you his opinion," said he.

In the end, and after Lettice had seen, not one, but several doctors whom Dr. Jones recommended, it was agreed that she should be left behind.

In the meantime Dr. Jones became a constant visitor, and the lads regretted that they had not known him earlier, for they liked him so much. All the doubt which Hugh had at first soon vanished.

"Lettice will be all right with Dr. Jones to look after her," he said on the morning when they were leaving.

"Yes," said Frank; "I almost wish I were ill, so that I could stay too. He is a capital fellow. Our holiday has had a good ending, has it not, Hugh?"

"Yes; and yet of course we cannot tell. We must not be too sanguine, for after all Lettice may be incurable."

"I think not. Jones will do his very utmost."

"I am sure he will; but even Jones cannot cure everybody."

"No, indeed," said Edward. "I remarked to him to-day that it must be delightful to be a doctor, so as to give relief to people who are suffering, and earn the lasting gratitude of whole

families ; but he looked quite pained, and said it was so sad to be unable to save all. He said he often thought of Jesus, who cured everybody of whatsoever disease they had, but human doctors so often failed even where they were the most anxious."

"I am glad Jones is a Christian man," said Hugh. "I think it is a pity all doctors are not good men. I would rather trust myself to a Christian."

"Why?" asked Frank.

"Because he would ask for wisdom to guide him. Don't you think a good doctor would pray for his patients?"

"Very likely."

"And besides, if I were ill it would be pleasant for the doctor to say a few good words to me."

"A doctor must have more opportunities of doing good than almost any other man," said Edward. "Some people will not allow ministers to visit them, but the doctor is sure to be sent for. If I were a doctor I would never deceive a patient. I think it is a terrible thing to let people die unprepared, without telling them of their danger."

"But Jones told me," said Hugh, "that he is afraid to speak as frequently as he would like. People who are not dangerously ill, perhaps, but who are bad enough, and whose lives have not been at all religious, are frightened at a word from him. He says one man said, after a visit of his, 'Fetch a lawyer and let me make my will. I must be going to die, for the doctor has spoken to me about Christ,' and he really made himself worse with anxiety."

"Lettice will not be made worse by anything that Dr. Jones may say," remarked Frank, with a smile. "His very presence seems to do her good. Do you notice how bright her colour is, and what a light comes into her eyes when he arrives?"

"Do not be foolish, Frank," said Hugh. "If I thought Lettice cared for him I should want to take her back with me at once."

"How can she care for him when she has only known him for a few days?" said Edward.

"I am sure she likes him well enough," said Frank.

"Of course, nobody can help liking him," said Hugh, shortly; and the conversation dropped, for it was time for making final arrangements.

Mrs. Clarence had many things to say to the matron of the establishment, in whose especial care Lettice was left. But this woman was very kind and motherly; and Lettice's mother felt that she need have no anxiety as to the result.

Lettice looked rather sad when the time for parting came.

"I do not know what I shall do without you all," she said. "I am so used to having you all about me, that I shall miss you very much."

"And we shall miss you, too," said Hugh. "The house will not be the same without Lettice."

"And yet I have not been able to do anything to make our home happy and bright for so long a time," said Lettice, regretfully.

"Have you not?" said the mother. "I think you have done as much as any one, my child."

"She has done more than any of us," said

Grace. "Her example has been always before us. Many a time when I have been tempted to be impatient and angry Lettice has quieted me."

"And her words have done me good frequently," said Hugh.

"Her love and sympathy have been my greatest comforts," said Mrs. Clarence.

"I am sure Lettice has had great power over me," said Frank. "I was very bad when I was at school, but I should often have been worse if I had not thought about Lettice, and known how grieved she would be to hear I had done wrong. I have seen her face with the sorry look upon it many a time in my imagination when we have been miles apart."

And Frank stooped to kiss his sister with unusual tenderness.

Lettice's eyes were full of tears. -

"I did not think I had been of any use at all," she said, "and here you are all praising and loving me so much! I am so thankful for it, and if God will bless the means to make me better, and I should really come back to you well and strong, how earnestly and constantly I will try to do something for your happiness."

They all went home with glad and hopeful spirits. The holiday had been a pleasant one, and everybody felt better for it. But there was not one of them who did not echo Hugh's words, "Hurrah for hard work and plenty of it."

CHAPTER XX.

A TRIAL FOR EDWARD.

AFTER they were all safely at home, and only Lettice had been left behind, Edward had a few days to spare before he returned to college. But he made good use of his time. He loved to study, and although it is always hard work, it was so pleasant to Edward, that he was seldom tired of it. "I have lost time enough. My holiday has made me well and strong, and I shall now apply myself with all my might to my books. I will give ten or twelve hours every day to my studies," said he.

"Ten or twelve hours are too many," said Hugh.

And he was right. All labour is wearisome if it be continued too long: and head work tires the worker as soon as any other. But Edward had not very long to stay at home, so that the strain would not be upon him for many weeks together. As it was, however, he worked too hard, and perhaps that was the cause of an occurrence which vexed and tried him exceedingly.

"What time did you rise this morning, Edward?" inquired Hugh, at the breakfast-table one day.

"I arose at half-past four," replied Edward.
Hugh laughed.

"You are keeping your holiday in a strange way," said he.

"I have had my holiday. I am back at my work now."

"So it seems. But, seriously, there is no need for you to rise so early."

"I think there is. I intend to do my very best at college this term; and in order to keep well in advance, it is necessary to study closely now. Many of the fellows sit up late to study, but I cannot do that."

"Why not?" inquired Frank.

"For a very good reason. I find that it is impossible to keep awake. Last night it was early when we went to bed, and I thought I would read for half an hour; but I actually fell asleep over my book before I had been at it for five minutes."

"That is a good thing," said Mrs. Clarence. "You will find that you are better able to work in the mornings than at night."

"Oh yes, but he must not work too hard, mother; that never pays."

"I will not work too hard, Hugh. If I find my health is really affected by close study, I shall give less time to it, and spend more in recreation."

"Here is the letter-bag, Hugh. Will you see if there are any letters from Lettice?"

"Yes, here is one addressed to me."

"Read it," exclaimed several together.

"Wait a moment. It may be private, you know."

"Nonsense! Lettice knows that we should all want to see every word which she writes."

"I will read it ; but I think I had better tell Lettice that if she should write any secrets to me, she must write 'private' on the outside."

"Why should Lettice tell you her secrets ?" said Grace.

"She might ask my consent or advice with reference to something, you know."

"Read her letter, and do not keep us longer in suspense."

"MY DEAR HUGH,—Thank you for your letter, which was most interesting, because it told me all the news about yourselves, which was just what I wanted to know. You will be glad to hear that I get better daily, and my nurse tells me that my improvement is wonderful. Yesterday I had three baths, and I am getting to enjoy them very much. Dr. Jones is exceedingly kind and careful over me. The medicine is doing me good, and I feel that I am much stronger already. I am not allowed to read much, so that if it were not for Dr. Jones the time would pass very slowly indeed ; but his conversation is very interesting, and I think he spends as much time with me as he can possibly spare. He orders me carriage drives, and yesterday, when I was out with two ladies, he rode by our side and pointed out many beauties which we had failed to see. He thinks the power to walk may yet come back to me ; and I tell him if it does I shall not be content with walking, but shall certainly want to skip and dance. The weather is very delightful. Yesterday the sea was rather rough, and the big waves came tumbling in so that sometimes they seemed as high as our windows. Some of the patients here are very agreeable, so I am not often dull.

We keep good hours, and Dr. Jones informs me that I need an unusual amount of sleep. When I tell you that I go to my own room every evening at eight o'clock you will see that I am in a fair way to get what I require. Give my love to everybody, especially dear mamma, and tell her that I miss her very, very much. I hope she will keep well, and that her boys are taking all possible care of her. Tell Edward I hope he will not be in too great haste to make his public appearance, for if he is only patient for a short time longer, I shall be able to sit through his first lecture. Your loving sister,

"LETTY."

"I am not sure that I shall wait for her," said Edward, who had been only half listening to the reading of his sister's letter, the other half of his attention being occupied with a letter of his own.

"What is your letter about?" asked Hugh. "Of course, now I have read mine, you cannot do less than read yours to the company assembled."

"I have no objection," said Edward. "It is from Coulson, who left school a year before you did, Hugh. This is his letter:—'Dear Edward, —I am arranging for a meeting here about the early closing movement. Our town is behind many others in this good direction, and our shopkeepers persist in keeping open until nine or ten o'clock every evening. Some of us have got up a little excitement, and we have taken the town-hall for next Thursday evening. We have engaged several good speakers, but I think the meeting will be all the better for a little youthful fire. Will you bring a supply of enthusiasm? Of course you must move the stony hearts of the customers

to feel compassion for the poor slaves of the counter, and if you are as effective as you used to be, I feel sure you will do our cause good. He who can draw tears from the eyes of schoolboys need not fear that anything will be impossible. Will you help us? Say yes, by return of post, without fail.' It is all very well, of course, but I do not know anything about my subject," said Edward.

"Oh, yes, you do; if not I will teach you," said Grace. "Do address the meeting, Edward; it will be a capital opening for you. It is a very good cause, you know."

"Is it?" said Edward, thinking of his own long days.

"Of course it is. You know the days are quite long enough for all the shopping to be done twice over."

"I am not so sure about that," said Hugh. "I remember going out with a certain young lady, whose name courtesy forbids me to mention; and although she did not make any extravagant purchases, my morning was worth nothing to me afterwards."

"Ah, that was because I—I mean that was because the young lady knew there was no cause for hurry. There were five or six of the assistants standing at the counters with nothing particular to do."

"Were there? But sometimes they are busy enough."

"Yes, on Saturdays, and also every evening just before it is time to close. But if all the shops agreed to be shut at a certain time people could make their purchases easily enough."

"That might be," said Edward; "but will the shop assistants make good use of their leisure if they should succeed in getting it?"

"Of course they will, Edward. How can you ask? They will give the winter evenings to their own self-improvement, for I am sure they must find it difficult when they never have a minute to themselves; and in the summer, of course they will take long walks into the country, and the fresh air and exercise will prove very beneficial."

"And must I say all this in my speech?"

"Yes; of course you must say this, and much more; and you must also say it in such a way as to convince those who hear you that it is only right to yield to your demands."

"You had better talk to some of them, if you do not feel sufficiently enthusiastic without," said Hugh.

"Very well, I will do so. But first I will write and tell Coulson that I will come and do my best."

Two days afterwards Edwards received a placard announcing the meeting, and saw his own name, with others, printed conspicuously.

"I feel rather nervous," said he. "It is a great thing for a youngster to speak in a town hall."

"What is a town hall? That is nothing," said Frank. "You need not be too proud of such an honour."

"I hope I shall have something good to say."

"Of course you will compose your speech beforehand?"

"I shall think of what I shall say. Indeed, I

will do it at once, before attending to anything else."

When Edward went to his own room he was quite surprised to find that he could not think of anything really good.

He sat at his desk with the clean white paper before him, wishing for thoughts which did not come.

"It is very strange," he said to himself. "Another time I shall not be able to write fast enough, and now when I want words it seems as if there are none."

It was really not strange at all. The fact was that Edward's brain was tired out. He had been using his powers extravagantly, and now he seemed to have no more strength.

He sat for some hours, only occasionally writing down a sentence or two, and these seemed so dull and common-place that he was ashamed of them.

"I must keep at it until I can think of something," he said.

But when the evening came he was quite miserable, because he was utterly dissatisfied with himself.

He went to bed feeling as much exhausted as if he had done something really good; and he slept so heavily that he did not wake until past the usual time the next morning.

But that was a good thing, for the rest had done him good, and his head felt better.

"Take my advice," said his mother, who had an inkling of the true state of the case, "and take a long walk. You can think your speech through as you go."

"But I ought to compose my speech standing at a sort of a counter in a hot room, in order to know how to plead for shopmen," said he.

"Not at all," said their mother. "You will do far better in the open air."

He took his mother's advice, and, of course, he found it good, for when he came back he declared himself quite ready to face the crowd in the town hall.

He did not feel nearly as ready when the evening really came. The day before, and the morning of that day, he had spent in study, and he was feeling tired and dispirited. He had not a long railway journey, but the few miles he had to go increased his headache, so that when he met his friend Coulson he was feeling very much excited.

"You are not well, are you, Edward?"

"Oh, yes, I'm very well."

"You seem rather feverish."

"I feel tired, that is all."

"Have you had plenty of sleep lately?"

"Not too much, I think."

"That is a pity. Nothing unnerves one like want of rest. You had better lie down upon my sofa for an hour or two. I am particularly anxious that you should make a good impression."

Edward did lie down, but he could not sleep; he spent his time in rehearsing his speech.

"I feel better now," he said to his friend. "I am quite ready. I have composed a few verses to bring in toward the end of my speech."

"Are you a poet then?"

"Oh, no! but I thought I would just try for once, and I think they will do."

Coulson looked anxiously at Edward. That was so unlike him: and, besides, he laughed in a strange way, and seemed to have no self-control.

"You must have some refreshment," he said, "and keep quiet until it is time for you to speak."

It seemed only a few minutes before Edward was on the platform, and heard his name announced by the chairman.

Then he arose, and his youthful appearance seemed to please the people. They looked at him eagerly, and waited for him to begin. Edward saw a thousand eyes lifted to him, and his courage and memory failed him.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began. But what had become of his speech? He could not remember a word of it. What was that opening sentence which he had thought would at once make a good impression, and secure the attention of the audience? He did not at all know where it was. He only knew that the people were too attentive. He wished they would turn their eyes in another direction, or begin to talk, or do something other than sit there with that half-amused, half-eager look upon their faces.

"Go on, Ned," said Coulson, in a whisper.

"I can only think of the poetry," said Edward; "shall I begin with that?"

"Yes, yes; it does not matter what you begin with, so that you make a beginning of some sort."

Edward saw the perspiration upon Coulson's face, and he began desperately with the words

which he had intended should conclude his speech.

“Go on, go on; for ye are but beginning
To aid with noble words the cause of right.
Go on, go on——”

He could not remember what came next. He waited, changing first red and then pale. Presently he thought he had it—

“Go on, go on; for ye are but beginning
To aid with noble words the cause of right.
Go on, go on——”

Again he stopped, for the next words had completely escaped him.

“Come, Ned, I say, what is the matter with you?” said Coulson, in an awful whisper.
Edward made a third attempt.

“Go on, go on; for ye are but beginning
To aid with noble words the cause of right.
Go on, go on——”

It was too much for the people, who broke out into peals of laughter, not a few shouting back the words—

“Go on, go on; for ye are but beginning!”

In the midst of the uproar, poor Edward made his escape.



CHAPTER XXI.

ALFRED AND DAISY.

It is time that you should hear something of the two youngest members of the Clarence family, Alfred and Daisy. As they were quite young children, they had nothing to do with the events that have been recorded in this history.

But they must not be left out of it, because every member of a family, even the youngest little child, has some power over the happiness or the misery of the whole.

Alfred and Daisy had been good children, and if they had not been able to contribute much to the pleasure and well-being of the others, they had not caused any trouble. They were playful and light-hearted, as all young children should be, and as their elders delighted to make them. They were obedient, too, and in that one word lies almost the whole duty of young children, who are of themselves scarcely able to judge between right and wrong, and who should therefore always be willing to be taught, and careful to remember the instruction that is given to them.

But Alfred and Daisy would have been wonderful children if they had absolutely never done wrong; and they were not wonderful at all, but just ordinary children, neither better nor worse than hundreds of my little readers. What is

meant is, that they were not wilfully bad, so as to cause anxiety and trouble.

They were now both away at school ; so that they did not often see their mother, or brothers and sisters. Of course the holidays were happy times, and most joyful meetings took place in them. But between the holidays they had to be content with letter-writing.

One morning Hugh Clarence read two letters with a very grave face. If he could have done so, he would liked to have said nothing about them, but to have kept the anxiety which they caused entirely to himself. But Mrs. Clarence was in the room when the letter-bag was opened, and her quick eyes saw and recognised the handwriting of both.

"Is Daisy well, Hugh?" she inquired as, quite contrary to the usual custom, he refolded the letter and put it in his pocket.

"Yes, mother, I think so ; she does not say anything about her health really."

"What does she say?"

"Of course she says several things. Cannot you guess what a young lady's letter is like?"

Mrs. Clarence knew her son so well that she was quite sure he was seeking to keep something from her.

"Hugh, I wish to see that letter."

"But, mother dear, it is marked private, and it is all about a little matter that only concerns Daisy and me."

"Do you think it right to keep secrets from your mother, Hugh?"

The colour came into Hugh's face. "I would rather you did not see it, mother ; but if you wish

to do so, here it is. It is a little unlike Daisy's usual letters, but I think it need not cause us any particular anxiety."

This is the letter which Mrs. Clarence read :—

"MY DEAR HUGH,—As you are my oldest brother, and stand in the place of dear papa, I write to you in confidence to tell you that the money which you allow me is not enough for my expenses. There are many things which a young lady must have of which you know nothing, and which are very expensive to buy. For instance, a new kind of earring has come into fashion in our school. All the girls have bought a pair, and it would look quite strange and mean of me if I did not wear them too. So I have purchased a pair of the best, but as my money is quite gone, I have been obliged to borrow some. I feel that it is dishonourable of one in my position to be in debt, so I write to ask you to send me a post-office order at once, that I may return the loan. I think it only right to tell you that many of the girls have double the money which you give to me, and yet none of them are richer than we are. It is very unpleasant to be short of money, and I think you should not subject me to the annoyance. If papa were alive, I think it would be different, and yet no doubt you do what you think to be right. The only difficulty is that you are ignorant as to the wants of young ladies. Please, dear brother, send me some cash directly, as we are to have a charade, and I want a new white dress for the occasion. I thought at first of writing to Frank, for I think he would be better able to understand my wants than you are.

But, on second thoughts, I have come to the conclusion that you are the proper person to whom I should apply, as now you are the head of the family. I hope you will not keep me waiting, because the business is urgent; and please tell me how much you are disposed to increase my monthly allowance. With love, believe me, my dear Hugh, your affectionate sister,

"DAISY."

When Mrs. Clarence had read the letter she looked at her son with a smile.

"Daisy imagines herself to be growing up," she said.

"Yes, that is it, I suppose. She is passing from the state of a school girl to that of a young lady."

"Has her letter given you pain, Hugh?"

"It has pained me a little, mother, because it shows that she does not trust me. I try to do my best for all the children, but they do not believe in me, and are seldom satisfied with what I do."

Mrs. Clarence laid her hand on Hugh's shoulder.

"It is one more trouble for you, my boy, but bear it bravely. If they do not understand you, and do you justice now, you have only to wait. When they are older they will appreciate all you have done for them."

"Oh, yes; I do not mind it much, mother."

Hugh looked into his mother's face with a bright smile. He was both brave and patient. He spoke the truth when he declared that he did his best. He was giving his life to his family, and

it was seldom that he allowed himself to be discouraged even when they were unjust to him.

"What is Alfred's letter about, Hugh? I am afraid from the expression of your face when you read it, that it is not any more satisfactory than this."

"Alfred is a boy, you know, mother, and he has a quick temper; that is all. I can soon put Alfred right."

"Hugh, I shall not permit you to bear the family burden alone. You must tell me what is in Alfred's letter."

Hugh handed to his mother the other letter which had slightly discomposed him.

"It is a very impetuous letter, mother," he said; "but it is certain that we need not be troubled about it."

The children's mother read Alfred's letter too.

"DEAR HUGH,—Some very strange and disagreeable things have been told me concerning Frank. At first I was inclined to knock down the fellow who told me; and I am not at all sure even now that I shall not do it. But a word from another boy warned me first to inquire whether or not the reports are true. Please tell me, by return of post, for I have a right to know, if Frank's conduct at school was all that the conduct of an honourable boy ought to be. Or is it true that his companions were of the worst kind, that his behaviour drew down upon him the severe rebukes of the masters, and that his favourite resort was a low public-house in the neighbourhood? If these abominable reports are true, I will denounce Frank, and he shall be no brother of mine; if

they are not true, I will severely punish the liar who has dared to utter them. Anxiously waiting your reply, I am, your affectionate brother,

“ALFRED.”

It was with no smile upon her face that Mrs. Clarence refolded this letter; she looked up at Hugh through tears.

“Poor Alfred, it is hard for him. He is a noble-minded boy, and cannot bear the disgrace.”

“Poor Frank,” said Hugh. “It is the hardest of all for him; for his wrong-doing has caused so much more trouble than he ever expected.”

“I think he would gladly undo it if he could.”

“I feel sure he would, only, alas! it is too late.”

“What shall you do about these letters, Hugh?”

“I think I should like to go and see both Alfred and Daisy. I can talk to them better than I can write; and perhaps I may be able to soften the truth I have to tell. For Daisy cannot have much more money than she has had already, and Alfred had better know the truth.”

“Yes, go, Hugh; nothing could be better. They will be so glad to see you.”

The next day (for Hugh was not one to lose time when he had once resolved upon a course of action) he went to see his younger brother and sister.

He called first upon Daisy. She was delighted to see her brother, whom she really loved very dearly.

And Hugh was glad to see her. She was look-

ing well, and had certainly grown since the last holidays; but there was an affectation in her manner which did not please him.

"Have you written the letter and brought it yourself, Hugh?"

"I am the letter, Daisy, and I hope you will find me interesting."

"That depends upon whether you contain a post-office order or not."

"I do not."

"Then I shall not care to read you. But seriously, Hugh, I must have some money. I am actually in debt."

"That is a very wrong state for young ladies to be in."

"But I could not help it."

"Excuse me, my little sister, but you could have helped it quite easily. Are those the earrings which you mentioned?"

"Yes; do you not admire them?"

"I cannot say that I do. They look common. Besides, I should prefer to see you without earrings at all."

"You have no taste, Hugh."

"I think the taste for earrings is very barbaric. I cannot see why it should be considered rude to wear rings in the nose, and civilised and refined to wear them in the ears."

"Cannot you? Then I pity your obtuseness," said Daisy, hotly.

"Can you see the difference yourself, Daisy?" inquired Hugh, smiling good-humouredly.

"Of course I can. But that has very little to do with the question. I have borrowed the money, and of course I must return it. And you

must also give me some besides to meet other expenses."

"How much do you want, Daisy?" Hugh's face and voice were very serious as he asked the question.

"I want five pounds," said Daisy, and Hugh could not help feeling that she said it defiantly.

He laid down five sovereigns upon the table beside her, but he looked so troubled that Daisy's heart was touched.

"You can quite well afford it, I suppose, Hugh?"

"No, I cannot afford it quite well, Daisy."

"How is that? I am sure I have often been given to understand that the business of 'Clarence Brothers' is a very good one."

"It is a good one, Daisy; but will you listen attentively and patiently to what I have to say?"

"Of course I will."

"Well, it is good; but all businesses are precarious. Only a few months ago we lost in a day what it takes many weeks to gain; and I can see that in order to make this year as productive as it ought to be, and to have the balance on the right side, the utmost care and diligence will be needed. I am very anxious about it, Daisy. You think perhaps that I might do better than I do; but I assure you that I am exceedingly desirous of doing the very best. There is much to be thought of. I cannot be quite comfortable until good provision has been made for our mother. I want her to be placed out of the reach of poverty for as long as she may live. I am putting away a sum of money every year for her especial use."

Daisy threw her arms around her brother.

"Dear Hugh, how good and thoughtful you are," she said.

"No, Daisy dear; I cannot do as well as I wish. I often make mistakes, but you see that I try, don't you?"

"Yes; I am sure you do."

"Then, you know, there is dear Lettice. I do not know whether she will really be cured; but if not, we could never bear to think that besides her sufferings she had any discomfort."

"No, indeed; and of course there are heavy expenses connected with her now."

"And then I am very anxious about Edward. I feel sure that he has great talents which may be of service to the world; but though he is very careful, a good sum of money is required to enable him still to pursue his studies. I should not trouble you with all this, little Daisy, only I do not want you to think that I am unreasonable when I ask you to be as economical as you can conveniently be."

"Oh, Hugh, dear, forgive me. I might have known the truth if I had only thought for a little about it. I will not increase your anxiety, but I will try to be careful. I have been much more extravagant than I need have been."

But Hugh spoke very pleasantly.

"Nothing is more easy than to be extravagant; and I have no doubt you thought we were better off than we are."

"Very likely. I have sometimes felt as if I could afford to look down upon girls who had less money than I. Was it wrong, Hugh?"

"It was both wrong and foolish. No one

whose money comes from a business should do that; for you know it is possible to be pretty well off one year, and ruined in the next."

"I think our conversation will help to make me more sensible."

"I am glad we understand each other. Have you any messages to send to mother?"

"Give my love to mamma, and tell her I shall be glad when the holidays come, for her foolish child needs her influence to keep her right."

"I am going to see Alfred now; so good-bye, Daisy."

"Hugh, will you not take back some of this money?"

"No, I will leave it, that you may do the best you can with it."

Hugh had greater difficulty with Alfred than he had had with Daisy.

"Well, Hugh, have you come to help me punish the boy who has maligned Frank?" he said.

"Why, what a war-like lad you have become, Alf! You look almost ready to thrash me."

"I have waited as patiently as I could, Hugh, but I shall not wait a minute longer than is necessary."

"What are you going to do?"

"That depends on what you have to tell me. Is the report true which I have heard?"

"Yes, it is true."

The colour came swiftly up over the boy's face, and his eyes flashed.

"Then you can tell Frank that I hate him. He has brought dishonour upon the family name, and —"

"Stop a minute, Alfred. Remember Frank is your brother, and nothing can alter that."

"But I disown him. He is no brother of mine, for I would scorn to do the things that he has done. I would rather die than act so shamefully."

"Alfred, do you know that it is much more easy for some people to be good than it is for others? It was much harder for Frank than it is for you."

"Perhaps. But if he had had the least bit of right feeling in him, he would have refrained from doing many things which he has done."

"He had a good deal of right feeling, but he was not strong enough to resist temptation, and when he was a schoolboy he had not learned the only way in which the weak can be strong—he did not know the value of prayer."

"Do you take his part, Hugh?"

"I pity him, Alfred, because I know that he has suffered much on account of his wrongdoing."

"Not more than he deserved, I am sure."

"Perhaps not, but we all receive more mercy than we deserve."

The two were quiet for a few minutes, then Alfred spoke again. "I cannot bear the disgrace, Hugh; neither can I rest until I have told Frank what I think of him."

"That disgrace is not yours, Alf, and I hope you will say nothing to Frank about what you have heard. He is trying to redeem his character, and the uphill way is quite hard enough without his brother making it harder."

"That is very fine, indeed! Is Frank to make us all wretched, while we are to be so tender of his feelings as not to mention the fact?"

"How angry you are, Alfred ! It is a sad truth that in almost every large family there is at least one member who causes the others some anxiety. It is a cross which has to be taken up and carried as cheerfully as may be. But if the other children are wise they will be as gentle as they can be with the erring one, and help him to gain strength and goodness by their sympathy. We are none of us as good as we ought to be, Alf, my boy ; but think of the best Friend, and how He treated us. ' While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' His love was wonderful ; should not our love for our brother be a little like it ? And Frank is really very different now."

Again there was silence, and afterwards Alfred said, "I will never taunt Frank with what I have heard, and I will try to pass it over here without being more wretched and angry than I can help."

"That is right, Alf. How are you getting on with your studies ?"

"I am first in the school, I believe."

"Well done ; and have you thought over your future occupation ?"

"Yes ; and I have quite decided that I should like to be a commercial man, and help you in our business."

"That is well. I will ask mother if she thinks you may leave school at the end of next quarter. She will be glad to hear what I have to tell her, that you will not only 'put up' with Frank, but that you will wisely and lovingly help him."

CHAPTER XXII.

EDWARD TRIES AGAIN.

"NEVER mind, Edward; some very great men have begun their career in humiliation which more than equalled yours."

It was Mr. Davis, Edward's old friend and schoolmaster, who spoke, and his tone was so cheery and hopeful that Edward felt encouraged at once.

"It was really dreadful, sir," he said; "I cannot bear to think of my standing on that platform, and being only able to think of the words—

"Go on, go on, for ye are but beginning," &c.

"It must have been good fun for the audience, Edward. Would you not have thought so if you had been one of them?"

"Yes, I am sure that I should," said Edward; and he could not help laughing as he said it. That was a good thing. As soon as we can laugh at the failures which have humiliated us it is a sign that we are beginning to take heart again.

"How do you feel about Coulson and his friends now, Edward?"

"At first I felt that I would rather die than see them again. But that was cowardly, I know. Now I feel as if I will certainly go amongst them at some future occasion and prove that I can speak."

"That is good, Edward. You are no less

likely to succeed in the end because your first effort was a failure. Indeed, I have no doubt it will do you good. It will certainly make you less confident, and perhaps more earnest. I advise you to try again. It would be good exercise for you to address a number of children. Next Sunday week there is to be a large gathering of Sunday-scholars; will you come and speak to them?"

"I should like to do it, if I could," said Edward.

"Come and try. I think you will be able to succeed; but if at the last moment your courage should fail you, I will be ready to step into your place."

"Thank you, sir; then I will try."

Edward had no time to prepare his address. He merely made notes of a few anecdotes which he had read, and also put down a simple line of thought upon a paper.

But when the time came he did not feel at all timid. He knew that it was perhaps more difficult to speak to children than to adults. But he also knew that it was far more easy to him to speak about Jesus than upon any other subject. When he stood in the pulpit, and saw hundreds of eyes lifted to his face, a great joy filled his heart.

"Perhaps I may be able to say something which shall make some of these children love the Lord Jesus," he thought.

And then he began to speak. He was very pleasant and cheerful. He said several things to make his hearers laugh, and then he won them to feel more seriously by his earnest, persuasive words. And he was very successful. He knew

the children did not want a dull sermon. He knew quite well how boys feel, and what they like; for he was not very far past boyhood himself. And he was very careful to say only such things as his hearers could understand and sympathise with; and the consequence was that they were very attentive. Not one wanted to talk or play so long as he could listen. But the best of all was this—that Edward could see by their faces that they felt what he was saying, and he had great hope that more than one would say that day, “My Father, Thou shalt be the guide of my youth.”

“I congratulate you, Edward,” said Mr. Davis, as soon as the service was over. “You will be a successful speaker yet, if only you persevere.”

He was determined that he would persevere, and that, no matter how many failures he might have, he would in the end succeed.

After that time he spoke at several meetings, and he succeeded so well that at length he wrote the following letter:—

“DEAR COULSON,—After my bitter experiences in your Town-hall, you will be surprised when I ask if you can arrange for me to give a lecture in the same place, at your earliest convenience. I want, if possible, to make the people forget my incapacity on that unfortunate evening. I think, perhaps, the very fact of my having afforded them so much amusement before will secure their attendance again. I should like the subject of the lecture to be ‘The Evils of Late Hours,’ as I can then say all that I intended to say on that never-to-be-forgotten evening, besides a few

things which I have thought of since. If you are afraid to trust me, do not hesitate to say so ; but I do not think such a provoking thing will ever occur again, and I should much like the opportunity to redeem my character. Please let me know what you think.—Yours sincerely,

“EDWARD CLARENCE.”

To this letter came a speedy reply.

“DEAR EDWARD,—I am glad to find that you have so much pluck. I am not a bit afraid. I will at once advertise the lecture for next Tuesday, and will tell my friends to anticipate a treat.—Yours, heartily,

“S. COULSON.”

It need scarcely be said that the placards announcing the lecture excited no little curiosity. Some blamed Coulson.

“A young man, a mere lad, who failed so ignominiously before, ought not to be allowed to occupy the platform again,” said they.

But others thought it a very brave attempt for Edward to make, and united to wish him great success.

Hundreds of people declared their intention of hearing the lecture ; and so, when the evening arrived, the hall was full.

Edward could not help seeing the smiles upon the faces of the people as he took his place. But he had the advantage of being in perfect health now, and he was not in the least afraid. Without apologising for his previous failure, or saying anything about it, he at once commenced his lecture, and the attention of the people was secured.

They listened as those who are anxious not to lose a syllable, and their eager pleasure was almost like inspiration to Edward. He felt that he could go on talking to them for some time to come, but he resolved that the lecture should be short, so that no one should be tired of it. Frequent bursts of applause greeted his sentences, and when at last he finished, quite an ovation rewarded him.

"Oh, Ned, my boy, I am glad I have lived to see this day," said Coulson.

"So am I," said a quiet voice; and, looking up, Edward saw, with intense astonishment, his sister Lettice.

"Is it really you, Lettice?"

"It is really. Do you not know me?"

"But I am so amazed to see you."

"It is my doing," said Dr. Jones. "And I am very proud to shake hands with the orator who has so delighted us this evening."

"How did you know of it, Dr. Jones?"

"I had a bill sent to me by a friend who thought I should be interested in anything which a Clarence did."

Edward thought it very kind of the friend, and did not in the least see why Lettice should blush so violently about it.

A very pleasant hour was spent after the lecture, and when Edward retired for the night he felt very happy and thankful.

He had reason to feel so, for the first of a series of successes had been achieved.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FIRST WEDDING.

"WE are going home with you, Edward," said Dr. Jones, on the morning after Edward had given his successful lecture.

"Are you? Do you mean that you and Lettice are going together?"

"Yes, why not? Your mother will be glad to see me, because I shall take Lettice, and she will find her wonderfully better. Hugh will be pleased too, and all the rest will give us a welcome. Are not you willing to let us go with you, Edward?"

"Of course, I am more than willing, only I have scarcely got over my surprise at seeing you last night. Mother will be astonished to find Letty so much improved."

"Yes, I think she will be. And do you not think it possible that she may be so grateful for the improvement as to be willing to grant any request that I may make?"

There was a peculiar twinkle in Dr. Jones's eyes, and a sort of exultation in his manner that rather puzzled Edward.

"I cannot tell," he said; "but you had better come and see for yourself."

There was great joy in the home of the Clarences on that day.

Mrs. Clarence held her daughter in her arms, and wept over her tears of joy and thankfulness.

"God has been very good to us, my darling," she said. "I did not think it possible that we should ever have so great a blessing given to us as that you should be restored."

"Can you really walk without assistance, Lettice?" cried Hugh. "Let me see you once again, for it seems almost too good to be true."

"It is true, Hugh," said Lettice. "Before long I expect to be able to walk almost as well as Grace."

"That may never be," said Dr. Jones. "But it is a great thing to see her so well as she is, is it not, Hugh?"

"It is, indeed," said Hugh.

"And how happy you look, Lettice," said Frank. "What is making you look so bright?"

"Have I not enough to make me?" said Lettice. "For one thing, I am at home with you all again, and that is enough of itself to make me happy."

"So it is, quite enough," remarked Hugh, looking significantly at his sister.

"But I think there is something more than even that," said Grace, with a girl's quick perception of what was really happening among them.

It was afterwards proved that Grace was correct in her opinion. Dr. Jones asked for a private interview, first with Hugh, and then with Mrs. Clarence.

"Hugh," he said, "I am going to ask you to give me your sister."

But Hugh looked as if he did not like the idea at all.

"We cannot spare Lettice," he said, "She

has been the joy and light of our home so long that I feel as if we cannot do without her."

"I am very selfish to want her, but I do want her very much. My home is more dark and lonely than yours, Hugh."

"Perhaps it is, Dr. Jones; but I wish you did not want our Lettice to brighten it."

"But I love her, and she has told me that she has learned to care for me. You would not make Lettice unhappy, Mr. Clarence?"

Of course he would not. And when Hugh came to think the matter over he felt that he would rather trust his beloved sister to Dr. Jones than to any other man whom he knew.

"Ask my mother," said Hugh. "Of course, if Lettice really wish it, I cannot object."

Dr. Jones spoke very gently to Mrs. Clarence. He felt that he was asking her for a great gift, and that perhaps she would miss Lettice too much.

"Never mind that," said Lettice's mother. "I am happy in the happiness of my children. I feel that you deserve to keep Letty, because you have been the means of restoring her to health. I hope she will be your joy, as she has been ours."

There was general joy in the family as soon as the good news had been circulated. Grace was especially delighted.

"It is a most happy thing to have an engaged sister," she said, as, after all the others had retired for the night, she went to Lettice's room for a cosy chat. "I am so pleased, because of course when you are married I shall be your chief bridesmaid."

"Is that the only reason why you are pleased, Grace?"

"No, dear. I am most of all pleased because I think you are happy. Are you really and truly happy, Lettice?"

"I am indeed, Grace. I never thought the joy of being loved would be given to me; but now that it has come I cannot help feeling thankful for it. It is a great thing to have the love of a good man."

"And Dr. Jones is very good, I know. But would you not like him better if he were not a doctor?"

"I should like him whatever he might be. But if I could have chosen I would rather have a doctor than any one beside."

"Why?"

"Oh, Grace, it seems so beautiful to be able to give relief from pain, and even in many cases to save life. And Dr. Jones is a Christian man. He knows that he cannot succeed without God's blessing."

"He has done great things for you, Lettice."

"Yes; is it not wonderful? I hope I shall use rightly the strength which God has given me. You cannot guess what joy it is to feel tolerably well."

"And it will not matter so very much if you are occasionally weak again. You will always have the doctor at hand."

"But I hope to be quite well and strong. I should like to help him in his work. He is very clever, exceptionally clever, as I heard a gentleman remark; and he may be able to do great things. He may discover some new cures. I

hope he will. I should like many to bless him, as I do, for what he has done."

While Lettice and Grace were thus talking, Hugh and Frank were holding a consultation too.

"What do you think of the matter, Hugh?" inquired Frank.

"I feel sorry to lose Lettice, but I like Jones. He will make her happy, and take great care of her. On the whole, I am glad, for Lettice's sake, that this has happened."

"Has he any fortune?"

"No; the only income he has is what his practice brings him."

"Then he ought not to have Lettice."

"Oh, yes. I do not see that that should make any difference. He is very skilful and persevering, and I have no doubt but that in time he will become prosperous."

"Perhaps he may. But there may be a long time to wait."

"I am going to propose to you that we should help him with a considerable sum."

"I do not know why we should do that."

"We can afford it, Frank."

"Perhaps. But we have no money to waste."

"I am sure it would not be wasted, but that Jones would make good use of it. You know our motto is Keep together. Jones will be our brother, and both for his own sake, and that of Lettice, we should do what we can for him. Perhaps he may become a very celebrated physician."

"At the same time that Edward is a celebrated lecturer. I think it is well that there is at least

one common-place individual among us, as I otherwise fear we should be in danger of becoming too much exalted."

"Then you agree with me that we should do whatever we can for Brother Jones?"

"Certainly. But what a name! Can a Jones become famous?"

"Lettice will not care for the name."

Nor did she. Lettice was very happy, and she soon became exceedingly busy, too, in preparing for her wedding. There was so much to do, and Mrs. Clarence wished that, as far as possible, they should do the work themselves; so all the members of the family who could assist in any way were called upon to do it.

"Grace is away a good deal," said Mrs. Clarence one day.

"Yes, mother dear, she has been; but Grace has had her secret as well as I."

"What do you mean, Lettice? Am I to lose both my daughters at once?"

"No. But Grace has been busy with her picture. And what do you think, mamma? It has been accepted by the committee, and will appear in the coming exhibition."

"I hope I shall not grow too proud of my children," said Mrs. Clarence.

She made the same remark at the wedding. The first wedding in the family is always a grand occasion, and the Clarences thought there were especial reasons why it should be so in theirs. Of course all were present. Daisy was delighted, and so was Grace. Hugh looked rather grave, and said he thought he felt more like the father than the brother of the bride. Frank and Alfred

thought it good fun. Edward said it seemed rather a solemn thing to get married.

Lettice thought so too. She looked very lovely in her bridal attire, and, perhaps, the earnest expression of her face added more to her beauty than anything beside.

It was rather a quiet wedding. They could not help thinking of their father who was not with them, and Mrs. Clarence said to Lettice, "How happy your father would have been to-day if he had been here."

"Not so happy as he is now," said Lettice; and the certainty of his joy comforted them all.

"So ends the first wedding in the family," said Frank, when the carriage containing Doctor and Mrs. Jones drove off.

"I wonder who will be the next of us to go?" said Daisy.

"I hope all the other marriages will be as happy as this," said Grace.

"God bless Lettice and her husband," said Edward, and they all echoed the wish.



CHAPTER XXIV.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS.

THE Clarence family spent a good many merry Christmases, but the one to be now described came when Lettice had been married ten years.

Ten years is a long time—long enough for many things to be done in it.' And many things had been done by our young friends. They did not look so young on this Christmas-day as when they were first introduced to us. No one would have recognised them to be the same, for they were so altered. They were all grown up, and instead of being children they were men and women. But they all met together to pass the happy Christmas time, and, on the whole, perhaps, there was no more happy party than they were to be found.

They were gathered round a bright fire for an after-dinner talk. An old lady with white hair sat on one side in an easy chair, and any one could see by the patient, pleasant smile upon her face that she was Mrs. Clarence. Next to her sat Hugh, a strong man with clear eyes, and the air of one who felt that his part in the world was no unimportant one. Next to him was Lettice, looking older, certainly, but more bright and happy than when she was a girl. Edward came next, and then Daisy, who was still called the child. Beside her was Dr. Jones, and next to him Alfred. Frank was the centre of the group, for he was standing with his back to the fire.

"'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain who build it.'"

The quotation came from Edward.

"That is very true," said Hugh. "It is the blessing of the Lord which has made us rich. Of course we have been industrious and frugal, but not more so than many others who have not met with such success as we have had."

"Everything that we have undertaken has prospered," said Frank.

"It is very wonderful!" said Alfred.

"We ought to be better than we are," said Dr. Jones.

"Indeed, we ought," said Frank. "We cannot help feeling that God is our Father, because He has cared for us so constantly."

"Neither can we help feeling that He has made us what we are. He not only gave us certain powers, but He gave us perseverance and diligence to cultivate them," said Edward. "He also gave us the inclination to keep together and help each other. We owe a good deal to that."

"So we do," said Hugh. "Lettice, do you remember one New Year's Eve, a long time ago, when you told us the story of the Bundle of Sticks?"

"Yes, I remember it very well. Quite early in the new year I was ill, and the doctors gave no hope that I should ever be better."

"Even wise people are mistaken sometimes," said Dr. Jones.

"I remember that night very well," said Hugh. "On the Christmas before, Frank and I had quarrelled, and Lettice felt very sad about it. So when New Year's Eve came she obtained mother's permission for us to sit up until the old year was out and the new year in; and she talked to us very seriously, and not only told us the story but pointed out the moral, and urged us to hold together whatever should happen."

"And it was a very profitable way in which to spend an hour, was it not, mother?" said Frank.

"I think it must have been, though I am rather surprised that I gave my consent for you to stay up so late," said Mrs. Clarence.

"We have kept together ever since," said Lettice.

"So we have, and what a good thing it has been," said Grace.

"If we had not we should not now be thriving merchants," said Frank.

"Neither would our eldest brother be the mayor of this town," said Edward.

"Neither would our brother Edward be an eminent preacher and lecturer," said Hugh.

"That is very true," said Edward. "What efforts you all made that I might go to college! Do you remember the money-boxes you had, and how you put into them every penny you could get toward my expenses?"

"Yes, I remember them," said Grace.

"We had to practise a good deal of self-denial over those money-boxes," said Alfred.

"But it did us good, as all our early troubles did," said Lettice.

"I remember that when I heard about your kindness to me I resolved that you should one day feel that it was not in vain," said Edward.

"We feel it to-day," said Lettice, "and are glad that we were able to help you."

"I often think about my early efforts to paint," said Grace. "How patient you all were with me, and how proud of me when I did anything that could possibly be praised."

"I remember that it was a good thing for Daisy and me when Hugh came to see us at school, and talked to us until we felt better," said Alfred.

"I remember that," said Daisy. "How ashamed I felt after you were gone, Hugh!"

"Did you, Daisy? You need not have done."

"But you were so good to me, dear Hugh."

"He has been good to us all," said Mrs. Clarence, softly.

"Oh, no," said Hugh; "we have all helped each other."

"I should have occupied a very different position but for the help which you gave me," said Dr. Jones; "and then what would have become of that celebrated cure about which the newspapers have so much to say?"

"Even that cure was not more remarkable than that which was wrought upon me," said Lettice.

"Ah, what a wonderful thing that was!" remarked Hugh.

"I often think of that time," said Lettice. "I do not know how I could have borne my trouble but for the kindness of you all. It used to be very hard to lie on that couch day after day, and be of no use to any one."

"But you were not useless even then, Letty," said Grace. "We should all have been worse but for you. And I can recollect how busy you used to be, with a few friends of yours to help, in making up articles of clothing for poor children."

"And very grateful they were," said Mrs. Clarence. "I do not forget how they came to see Lettice married, and strewed flowers in her way."

"Neither do I forget it," said Lettice. "It was very kind of them, and the flowers looked so pretty; but, before that happy time, I used to feel

as if I were good for nothing, although you all bore with me so patiently."

"We did not bear with you at all," said Hugh. "We loved you."

"No, it was I who had to be borne with," said Frank. "I often pray now, 'Remember not the sins of my youth.' What a trouble I caused you all! To think of a Clarence having actually robbed his schoolfellows!"

"But he more than made it up to them afterward," said Alfred.

"But wrongs cannot be undone," said Frank. "And I had a narrow escape about that railway affair. I discovered then the worth of a good character. No one would have suspected me of that if I had always been upright before. But even that was not so bad as my going away, and leaving you all. I cannot forgive myself when I think of poor father."

"Do not blame yourself, my boy," said Mrs. Clarence. "You need cast no shadow over this happy day by sad memories. As much as it is possible for any man to do so, you have redeemed the past. Let it lie behind you. There is no need to refer to it now."

"I should not grieve so much if I could ask my father's forgiveness," said Frank, in a broken voice.

"He has forgiven you long ago," said Lettice.

"And God has forgiven you, too," said Edward.

"What a beautiful promise is this, 'I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.' If He promises to forget, may not we?"

"No," said Frank, "for part of our safety lies in remembering our own weakness."

"I believe our failures often help to make us strong," said Hugh. "If we are wise we shall avoid the places where we have once fallen. I believe you are all the better, Frank, for those early sins and sorrows."

"At least I think it has made me able to sympathise with those who are tempted and weak," said Frank.

"I have often feared that my example led you wrong at first, Frank," said Hugh. "It is a serious thing to be the oldest in the family."

"And rather tiresome to be the youngest," said Daisy.

"Why?"

"Because I can take no considerable part in this conversation about Auld Lang Syne."

"Never mind, my child," said Mrs. Clarence: "it is a pleasant way in which to spend an hour of the Christmas-day, and we cannot tell how many more we shall spend together."

"Many more, I hope," said Hugh. "I have not done nearly all that I hope to do in the world."

"But I think no one can really say that he has finished his work. I expect that every life, even the longest, is somewhat broken."

"Only Jesus could say, 'I have finished the work Thou gavest Me to do.' But our work is often incomplete."

"Listen, there are the bells again," said Daisy. "What happy things they are! Christmas would not be nearly so merry if it were not for the bells."

"But the one thing that makes Christmas happier than any other festival is that it is the family gathering time," said Lettice. "What happy meetings there are to-day in all parts of the land!"

"I am glad our family is so large," said Hugh. "I pity the small parties of two's and three's to-day."

"I am glad there are plenty of us," said Edward; "for though a man may have many friends in the world, there are none so near and dear as the members of his own family. I would not lose my mother or one of you for all the world. I hope we may have many happy Christmas times together in the old place."

"I hope so, too. There is no place like home," said Hugh.

"And I hope," said Mrs. Clarence, "that every year will find us travelling heavenward together, so that when our family gatherings are over here we may all meet again in the place which Jesus has gone to prepare for us."

"It would be sad to miss our way there," said Frank.

"But we shall not miss it," said Mrs. Clarence; "for Christ is the way, and we have all found Him; so we have only to walk where He leads, and wait until He tells us to rest with Him in heaven."

THE END.

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